Global communities urged to join the fight to stop meningitis this World Meningitis Day

World Meningitis Day, 24 April 2012, calls for people across the world to know about the signs and symptoms, urgency to treat and vaccines available to prevent this potentially deadly disease

Auckland, New Zealand – The Confederation of Meningitis Organisations (CoMO) is urging people all over the world to “Join Hands Against Meningitis” in an effort to reduce the global impact of the disease. The call-to-action encourages individuals, families and communities to learn the signs and symptoms of meningitis, the importance of urgent treatment of the disease, and that prevention is available through vaccination against some forms of meningitis.

Meningitis is a potentially deadly inflammation of the brain and spinal cord, which can be the result of a virus, bacteria, or other microorganisms, and can be associated with a potentially life-threatening blood infection (sepsis). Each year hundreds of thousands of people around the world die from meningitis, or suffer life-long disabilities. Bacterial meningitis, which is the most severe and common form, causes around 170,000 deaths globally every year. Those surviving meningitis can have their lives devastated as a result of long-term effects, such as deafness, brain damage, and limb-loss.

While the disease can affect people of all ages, infants, children and adolescents are at an increased risk of infection. Meningitis is not always easy to recognise in the early stages, and symptoms can be similar to those of the common flu. Some symptoms to look out for are fever, vomiting, headache, stiff neck, sensitivity to light, drowsiness, muscle and leg pain. Many people do not know the warning signs of infection or that many types of meningitis can be vaccine-preventable.

“CoMO is committed to eradicating meningitis across the globe. World Meningitis Day gives us the opportunity to remind communities that meningitis is a deadly disease and one that can cause death or permanent disability in hours. People need to know the signs and symptoms, the importance of urgent treatment and the preventive role of vaccines. Anyone can get meningitis and empowering people with knowledge about the disease could save a life. We encourage global communities to unite in the fight against meningitis this World Meningitis Day,” said Bruce Langoulant, President and Member of the Governing Council of CoMO and father of a meningitis survivor with significant disabilities.

CoMO and its members are recognising the fourth annual World Meningitis Day by hosting a series of events around the world to show strength in numbers and solidarity for this important cause. CoMO aims to unite one million people from all over the world – approximately the same number that will suffer from bacterial meningitis this year – to show their support and virtually join hands against meningitis at: www.comoonline.org

To drive better awareness of the signs and symptoms of meningitis, CoMO has today launched a video entitled ‘If I’d known then what I know now’ that features a range of people affected by meningitis and shares their knowledge in an effort to educate others and reduce the incidence of those impacted by the disease. The video can be accessed at: http://www.youtube.com/user/COMOmeningitis/featured

Vaccines are available to help prevent some but not all strains of bacterial meningitis. Additional vaccines are being developed to help prevent against other common strains. CoMO supports the use of approved,

* The signs and symptoms of meningitis provided do not include every possible sign and symptom. They do not appear in a particular order and some symptoms described may not occur at all. Please consult your local healthcare professional for further information.
recommended vaccines, which have been shown to be safe and effective, as a means of preventing meningitis, and calls for the development and approval of new vaccines to help prevent remaining serogroups.

To learn more about meningitis and World Meningitis Day activities near you, please visit the CoMO website: www.comoonline.org. For information about vaccines available in your country, talk to your healthcare professional or visit the ‘Find a CoMO Member in My Country’ page to contact a CoMO member near you.

Your local meningitis foundation:

The Meningitis Foundation Aotearoa New Zealand
Andrea Brady: +64 (0) 21 977 688
info@meningitis.org.nz
www.meningitis.org.nz (coming soon!)

About Meningitis
Meningitis is an inflammation of the brain and spinal cord, and can be the result of infection by bacteria, viruses and fungi.¹ Bacterial meningitis is the most serious type of meningitis, and it is often associated with a potentially life-threatening blood infection (sepsis).¹² The most common bacteria causing meningitis and septicaemia are *Haemophilus influenzae* type b (Hib), *Streptococcus pneumoniae* (pneumococcal) and *Neisseria meningitidis* (meningococcal).²

Meningitis can develop rapidly and its symptoms often resemble the flu (e.g., fever, drowsiness and headache), which makes it difficult for doctors to diagnose and patients/family members to recognise.⁵ Even with early and appropriate treatment, the rates of death and serious long-term effects of the disease can be high.¹ Survivors often suffer serious long-term consequences, such as deafness, brain damage, and limb loss.¹⁴ While the disease can affect people of all ages, infants, children and adolescents are at an increased risk of infection.⁵ Immunisation against bacterial meningitis with those vaccines that are available is essential;¹ no one should suffer from this disease.

About World Meningitis Day
World Meningitis Day – annually on 24 April – is dedicated to raising awareness of the signs and symptoms of meningitis, the urgency to treat the disease, and that prevention is available through vaccination against some forms of meningitis.

The global awareness day has grown over the past three years and now reaches across the globe from North and South America, through Europe to the Middle East, into the Indian subcontinent and throughout South East Asia and the Far East to Australia to join hands across state lines, country borders and continents.

This year’s World Meningitis Day is sponsored by Novartis and Pfizer.

About the Confederation of Meningitis Organisations (CoMO)
CoMO was founded in September 2004, at the close of a World Conference of Meningitis Organisations. Encouraged by the information shared at the meeting, 20 delegates formed CoMO in order to help support the fight against meningitis by emphasising the global burden of the disease and supporting the establishment of new meningitis and children’s health organisations.
CoMO now has 34 members in 22 countries around the globe. The global organisation is focussed on stopping meningitis worldwide and supporting its member organisations in raising awareness about meningitis, growing its membership base to provide support to as many countries across the world as possible, and supporting those dealing with the potentially devastating consequences of this disease.

To learn more about CoMO and its member organisations, visit www.comoonline.org.

Media contacts:
Georgia Ball
Marketing & Fundraising Officer, CoMO
Email: gball@ichr.uwa.au
Phone: +61 499 078 577

Jessica Langoulant
Marketing & Communications Officer
Email: jlangoulant@ichr.uwa.au
Phone: +61 8 9489 7789 / +61 408 926 305

Your local media contact:
Andrea Brady
The Meningitis Foundation Aotearoa New Zealand
Email: info@meningitis.org.nz
Phone: +64 (0) 21 977 688
www.meningitis.org.nz (coming soon!)

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References