

Testimony: HB2205 – Vaccinations for Meningitis
Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee
March 16, 2017

By: Dr. Lynn Fisher, KAFP President (Written only)

Chairwoman Schmidt and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to express **support of HB2205** on behalf of the Kansas Academy of Family Physicians (KAFP). Our organization represents over 1,660 active, resident, student and life members across the state. The mission of KAFP is to promote access to, and excellence in, health care for all Kansans through education and advocacy for family physicians and their patients. One way family physicians provide excellence in health care for their patients is through a **strong commitment to vaccinations**. KAFP supports the addition of vaccinations for meningitis to the required vaccinations specified under K.A.R. 28-1-20(b).

Meningitis is a rare but very dangerous bacterial infection. It can strike rapidly and unexpectedly, even in healthy individuals. Very young children and persons 16-23 years of age are at the highest risk of contracting meningitis.¹ Early symptoms of meningitis are flu-like, which may cause parents to abstain from seeking medical attention, thinking their child just has the flu. Unfortunately, **this disease acts fast and can kill people within 24 hours of the onset of symptoms.**² The disease has a 10-15% fatality rate, with as many as 20% of survivors being left with permanent disability.¹ Meningitis infections in the blood stream pump the bacteria it to all parts of the body and can cause neurologic damage ranging from infections in the lining of the brain and spinal cord, to loss of limbs and hearing impairment.^{1,2}

The Centers for Disease Control recommend the meningitis vaccine as the best way to protect Kansans against the meningococcal disease.³ KAFP agrees.

Kansas school children and university students are at an increased risk of contracting meningitis because of common/shared spaces. Meningitis is spread from person to person through the exchange of respiratory and throat secretions, such as coughing, sneezing, kissing, or sharing drinking glasses with an infected person.³ Classrooms and dormitories provide the perfect common/shared environments for meningitis to spread. Vaccinating Kansans against meningitis prevents the spread of this deadly and debilitating disease.

Unfortunately, according to 2015 vaccination rates, only 63.7% of Kansans ages 13-17 have received the meningitis vaccination, falling 17% below the national average. More specifically, **Kansas has one of the lowest meningococcal vaccination rates in the country.**⁴ This is very concerning to Kansas family physicians. According to the Immunization Action Coalition, 27 other states require meningitis vaccination for elementary and secondary schools.⁵

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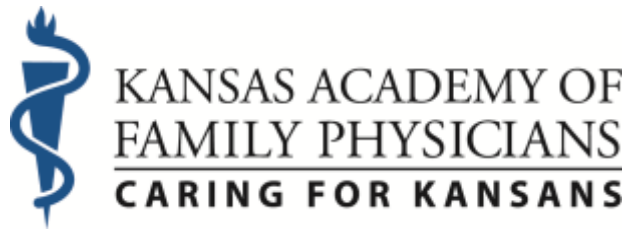
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The U.S. military tackled the issue of meningitis head-on in 1985 by requiring all recruits to have the meningitis vaccine as a military standard. Prior to this standard, U.S. military personnel were at a higher risk than the general US population to contract meningitis, likely due to close living quarters in military barracks. Since the meningitis vaccine requirement went into effect, meningococcal disease in U.S. military personnel has decreased by more than 90%.⁶

Supporting HB2205 is an important step you can take to protect Kansans. Last year KAFP and the Immunize Kansas Coalition worked closely with Chairwoman Schmidt to sponsor a resolution declaring a week in April as *Kansas Meningitis Awareness Week*. The goal was to encourage Kansans to help eradicate bacterial meningitis through public education about the vaccine.⁷ This awareness week in 2016 was helpful. Supporting HB2205 is the next logical step in continuing that work. It will go beyond education to provide proven protection for Kansans from this debilitating and deadly disease.

In summary: **Meningitis can be easily spread. Meningitis can be deadly within hours. Meningitis can be prevented with a vaccine.** You have the opportunity to ensure that Kansans have the best line of defense to prevent the spread of meningitis through by requiring the vaccine, as outlined in HB2205. Thank you for the opportunity to present these comments. We strongly urge your support of HB2205.

References:

- 1 Meningococcal disease and the men B vaccine. (2016, February 18). Retrieved February 10, 2017, from AAFP.org, <http://www.aafp.org/patient-care/public-health/immunizations/disease-population/meningococcal.html>
- 2 A Call to Change. Retrieved February 10, 2017, from Immunize Kansas Coalition, <http://www.immunizekansascoalition.org/documents/menresources/Call%20to%20Change%20-%20Community.pdf?v=8>
- 3 Helping to protect your child from danger: meningococcal disease. Retrieved February 10, 2017, from VoicesOfMeningitis.org, <http://www.voicesofmeningitis.org/upload-files/Voices-of-Meningitis-Letter-to-Parents.pdf>
- 4 Meningococcal Vaccine Toolkit. (2017). Retrieved February 10, 2017, from Immunize Kansas Coalition, <http://www.immunizekansascoalition.org/meningitis-toolkit.asp>
- 5 Immunization Action Coalition. (2016, February 29) Retrieved February 10, 2017, from Immunize.org, http://www.immunize.org/laws/menin_sec.asp
- 6 Broderick, M. P., Phillips, C., & Faix, D. (2015). Meningococcal Disease in US Military Personnel before and After Adoption of Conjugate Vaccine. *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, 21(2), 377-379. <https://dx.doi.org/10.3201/eid2102.141037>.
- 7 Kansas Meningitis Awareness Week April 16-20. (2016). Retrieved February 10, 2017, from KDHEKS.gov, <http://www.kdheks.gov/immunize/meningitis.htm>