

Meningitis Claims Four in Miami – Passport Health Urges Vaccination
Bitter Irony for South Floridians, *World Meningitis Day is April 25, 2009*

Miami, FL- 4/23/09- A virulent strain of meningitis, *Neisseria meningitidis* W-135, is responsible for the deaths of four people in South Florida. Eight others have been infected in the past six months.

These deaths come just days before the first annual World Meningitis Day which begins April 25, 2009. The day is meant to raise awareness and educate Americans about the dangers of contracting the meningococcal disease. “We recognize the dangers of meningitis and the importance of being vaccinated against the disease,” said Fran Lessans, CEO of Passport Health, the largest provider of travel medical services and immunizations in the U.S.

Although the W-135 strain can be treated with vigorous, early intervention with antibiotics, Lessans warned that this is a fast-acting strain and “death can sometimes occur within hours of first symptoms.”

Neisseria meningitidis is the leading cause of bacterial meningitis in the United States. According to the CDC, serogroups B,C and Y are the major causes of meningococcal disease. Among those over age eleven, 75% of cases are caused by serogroups C, Y, or W-135. “The vaccines available in the United States protect against these 3 serogroups and there is plenty of vaccine available in Miami and throughout the U.S.,” commented Claudie Boulay, RN, Executive Director at Passport Health Miami after stating that the general population, especially those at risk, often does not get vaccinated.

Meningitis is an infection of the fluid surrounding the spinal cord and brain. Children and young adults, especially those living in close quarters or sharing utensils, dishes, bottles cigarettes and glasses are at higher risk; although persons of any age can become infected. “Most people don’t realize that even second hand smoking may put you at risk. The bacteria or viruses are exhaled with the smoke and breathed in by other people in the room,” stated Boulay.

Of the two causes of infection, bacterial meningitis is often more serious and has a higher fatality rate than viral meningitis. Symptoms include fever, headache, stiff neck, sensitivity to light, rash and sometimes seizures.

Officials in Miami-Dade are urging hospitals and doctors to notify the Miami-Dade Health Department as soon as they discover any new cases so they can take protective measures. For more information on vaccinations visit www.PassportHealthMiami.com or call 305-642-9889 to make an appointment, or inquire about an on-site clinic.