

## MEDIA RELEASE



### GLOBAL CAMPAIGN TARGETS DEADLY MENINGITIS

*World Meningitis Day urges all governments to offer protection through National Immunisation Programmes.*

**Perth, Australia, 24 April 2013** – Governments worldwide are being encouraged to take up the fight against meningitis by including vaccines that can protect communities against the disease in their National Immunisation Programmes.

The global campaign was launched today by the Confederation of Meningitis Organisations (CoMO) to mark World Meningitis Day.

“Each year more than 1.7 million people are affected by various forms of meningitis with the most severe cases resulting in thousands of deaths and permanent, life changing disabilities,” said CoMO President Bruce Langoulant.

“Tragically, much of this suffering could be avoided because there are vaccines available that can protect children and adults from the devastating consequences of the disease.

“We’re urging communities worldwide to ‘Join Hands Against Meningitis’ by registering their support for governments to include available vaccines in their immunisation programs.

“Evidence over the last 20 years has proven beyond doubt that this is the most effective way to reduce the spread of the most severe forms of meningitis and its devastating impact.”

Meningitis is a potentially deadly inflammation of the brain and spinal cord that can result from a virus, bacteria or other microorganisms, and that can also be associated with the life-threatening blood infection, sepsis.

Bacterial meningitis is the most severe and common form and even with prompt diagnosis and treatment causes approximately 170,000 deaths globally each year and twice as many people to sustain permanent damage and disability.

In most cases this can be prevented with vaccines, however National Immunisation Programs worldwide are inconsistent in their inclusion of meningitis-preventing vaccines.

“Meningitis is a global issue that can affect anyone, anywhere and at any time yet the most serious forms can be prevented with vaccines, therefore saving innocent people from death and disability and their families from the resulting heartache,” said Mr Langoulant who is also the father of a meningitis survivor with significant disabilities.

“For many years now safe and effective vaccines have been used to protect against the three major causes of bacterial meningitis, commonly known as meningococcal, pneumococcal or Haemophilus influenzae type b or Hib.

“The Hib vaccine has been widely available for some time and this has caused Hib meningitis to be close to elimination.

“Sadly, this isn’t the case for the other causes of bacterial meningitis leaving all of us, and particularly children under the age of 5 and adolescents, at risk of contracting the disease.

“We urge governments worldwide to protect their citizens from this disease and add these vaccines to their National Immunisation Programs.”

To join the global effort to prevent meningitis and to learn more about World Meningitis Day activities taking place near you, visit the CoMO website: [www.comomeningitis.org](http://www.comomeningitis.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.

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### About Meningitis

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

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.<sup>1,3</sup> Even with early and appropriate treatment, the rates of death and serious long-term effects of the disease can be high.<sup>1</sup> Survivors often suffer serious long-term consequences, such as deafness, brain damage, and limb loss.<sup>1,4</sup> While the disease can affect people of all ages, infants, children and adolescents are at an increased risk of infection.<sup>5</sup> Immunisation against bacterial meningitis with those vaccines that are available is essential,<sup>6,7,8</sup> no one should suffer from this disease.

### About World Meningitis Day

World Meningitis Day, held annually on 24 April, is a day dedicated to raising awareness of meningitis, the important role of vaccinations in preventing the most deadly forms of the disease, as well as supporting those who have been touched by the disease.

The global awareness day has grown over the past four 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.

### About the Confederation of Meningitis Organisations (CoMO)

The Confederation of Meningitis Organisations Inc. (CoMO) is an international member organisation working to reduce the incidence and impact of meningitis worldwide.

CoMO brings together patient groups, health professionals and organisations, meningitis survivors and families from more than 25 countries to help prevent meningitis through raising public awareness of meningitis, advocating for meningitis vaccines to be available to families worldwide and connecting and resourcing a strong global network of members who make sure their communities have access to meningitis information and support.

To learn more about CoMO and its member organisations, visit [www.comomeningitis.org](http://www.comomeningitis.org).

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- <sup>3</sup> CDC. Factsheet: Meningococcal Disease and Meningococcal Vaccine, Viewed 25 March 2013, <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/mening/vac-mening-fs.htm>
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- <sup>5</sup> CDC. Factsheet: Meningococcal Disease and Meningococcal Vaccine. Viewed 25 March 2013, <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/mening/vac-mening-fs.htm>
- <sup>6</sup> Source: WHO/IVB database, 194 WHO Member States. Data as of July 2012.
- <sup>7</sup> Source: WHO/IVB database, 194 WHO Member States. Data as of October 2012
- <sup>8</sup> Source: WHO/IVB database, 194 WHO Member States. Data as of October 2012