



## THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

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### COALITION OF ELECTED OFFICIALS AND CITY AND STATE AGENCIES RESPOND TO MENINGITIS OUTBREAK

*State Senators, Assembly Members, City Council Members and City and State officials alert and inform New Yorkers*

**New York, NY** – In the wake of an outbreak of a strain of invasive meningococcal disease among men who have sex with men (MSM) in New York City, a coalition of LGBT City and State elected officials has been working closely with the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOH), the New York State Department of Health and the New York State Department of Financial Services to respond swiftly and comprehensively to this threat to public health.

According to the NYC DOH, 17 cases have been reported since 2012 among MSM. There have been 22 reported cases – including seven fatal cases – since 2010. Health officials have expressed concern that the disease is in danger of spreading further and are urging those most at risk to get vaccinated immediately.

Elected officials have taken action to alert and inform members of the LGBT community, health care providers and community based organizations about the DOH's advisory. Recently, the coalition of State Senators, Assembly Members and City Council Members hosted a briefing for LGBT community leaders from all five boroughs at which City health officials made a detailed presentation, answered questions and asked for the LGBT community's assistance with outreach. Additionally, the coalition and health officials hosted separate briefings for elected officials in Brooklyn, where the outbreak is most acute.

"The Council and our partners have been working diligently and continuously to make sure that New Yorkers know how to protect themselves from meningitis," said **City Council Speaker Christine C. Quinn**. "I want to thank officials from both the City and State, including Superintendent Ben Lawskey of the State Department of Financial Services and Commissioner Thomas Farley of the City Department of Health, for working collaboratively with LGBT elected officials to help spread the message that men who have sex with men should protect themselves from this potentially fatal disease. We want every New Yorker who could potentially benefit from this vaccine to have the information they need and access to the medication."

The coalition has taken action to address the health threat, including:

- Speaker Quinn's office convened a meeting between DOH and the organizers of LGBT Pride to better coordinate outreach during this year's pride festivities in June.
- Elected officials sent a sign-on letter to urge the managers of a popular gay online dating website to cooperate with DOH outreach efforts, as they previously had not.
- The coalition supported Senator Hoylman's outreach to the State Department of Financial Services, who then sent notice to insurers statewide informing them that under State law, health insurance plans must cover meningitis immunizations.
- The coalition supported Senator Hoylman's introduction of legislation (S.4881) that would expand access to the meningitis vaccine by allowing pharmacists to administer the immunizing agents.

The coalition's future plans include:

- Joining DOH to formally urge providers and physicians to heed the agency's recommendations for vaccinations.
- Organizing meetings for LGBT community leaders, elected officials and health care providers and being planned, as well as public town halls in Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens. The City Council has created informational materials for distribution within the LGBT community.
- Working with non-profit organizations to hold vaccination days with volunteer physicians and nurses administering the vaccine to an increased number of people.
- Working with DOH to help uninsured New Yorkers access the vaccine.

"Last month, in response to our request, New York State Superintendent of Financial Services Benjamin Lawsky sent letters to health insurers directing them to inform health care providers and the public that meningitis vaccines are covered under insurance," said **State Senator Brad Hoylman**. "I commend Superintendent Lawsky and the Cuomo Administration for their decisive action, which will clarify the situation and raise much-needed public awareness about this deadly disease and the importance and availability of the life-saving vaccination. I am working to ensure that legislation to expand access to meningitis vaccine comes to the floor of the Senate this session."

"Upon learning of the devastating outbreak of meningitis, local elected officials on a city and state level have taken multiple steps to protect at risk communities from further infection. Our actions have resulted in a dramatic rise in the number of inoculations against meningitis and an increased awareness of this serious epidemic across the City. I am extremely proud of my colleagues and of Speaker Quinn in particular for leading this effort. By working together we will ensure that no more lives are needlessly lost," said **Assembly Member Deborah Glick**.

**Assembly Member Danny O'Donnell** said, "I am proud to stand with Speaker Christine Quinn and other LGBT elected officials alongside community health advocates in the fight against this deadly strain of meningitis. As we work to spread the word to our community and prevent a major outbreak of the disease, I would like to encourage individuals to get immunized and do their part in this important effort."

“The meningitis outbreak in New York City is literally a life and death matter, and I applaud Speaker Quinn for taking the lead in coordinating elected officials' effort to help educate New Yorkers at risk,” said **Assembly Member Micah Kellner**.

**Assembly Member Matthew Titone** said, “New Yorkers come together at times of crisis. We must do all we can to get the word out about the danger of meningitis infection and the benefits of vaccination, and we must do all we can to make the vaccinations readily available and affordable to those most at risk.”

“I urge all men who have sex with men to vaccinate themselves against meningitis during this most recent outbreak,” said **Council Member Daniel Dromm**. “Awareness and prevention are always the best defense against a public health threat of this kind and New Yorkers should heed the recommendations of our health professionals and inform themselves as much as possible.”

“As soon as we learned of the details of the meningitis outbreak last year, the New York City Council immediately pulled together the leading experts to identify next steps in order to prevent an emergency situation,” said **Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer**. “I am extremely proud of how we have raised awareness within the LGBT community about the dangers of meningitis and made New York City a safer place.”

“I am so proud to have joined my State and City colleagues in taking a number of proactive measures designed—literally—to save people’s lives. Through spreading the word about the availability of vaccines (and insurance coverage therefor) that can effectively fight this strain of bacterial meningitis—to conducting focused outreach those who may be disproportionately affected by this disease—we have responded to this crisis with a united front designed to empower New Yorkers,” said **Council Member Rosie Mendez**.

The Health Department advises vaccinations for all HIV positive MSM and MSM, regardless of HIV status, who regularly have intimate contact with other men met through a website, digital application (“App”), or at a bar or party. To find a location to get a vaccine, call 311. For more information, please visit [nyc.gov/health](http://nyc.gov/health) or [council.nyc.gov](http://council.nyc.gov).

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