Honoring Dr. Sara Branham Matthews

Insights 08.14.26

In recognition of National Immunization Awareness Month (NIAM), HLB honors Dr. Sara Branham Matthews (1888–1962), a microbiologist and physician whose research on meningitis and other infectious diseases, advanced the science of vaccines and disease prevention.

Dr. Matthews discovered and isolated *Neisseria meningitidis*, the bacterium that causes meningococcal meningitis, during her time at the U.S. Public Health Service's Hygienic Laboratory, which is now the National Institutes of Health (NIH). She became an internationally recognized expert on *Neisseria* and identified sulfa drugs as a significantly more effective treatment for meningococcal meningitis.

Dr. Matthews' research and improvements to laboratory techniques largely expanded scientific understanding of *N. meningitidis*, including the identification of different strains. *Branhamella catarrhalis* was named in her honor posthumously. Her pioneering work helped establish a broader scientific foundation for the development of meningococcal vaccines.

Learn more about Sara Branham Matthews here.