Preface

Meningococcal disease has apparently emerged relatively recently, with definitive descriptions dating only from 1805 in Europe and North America and 1905 in Africa. During the 20th century it attained a global distribution both as an endemic and epidemic disease, with a number of pandemics. At the beginning of the 21st century, the disease remains a major challenge globally with around 500,000 cases a year, 300,000 of which occur in sub-Saharan Africa: these numbers increase substantially in those years when major epidemics occur in Africa.

The basis for this Handbook of Meningococcal Disease was the classic book edited by Keith Cartwright entitled Meningococcal Disease and published by John Wiley & Sons in 1995. This book brought together up-to-date information on all aspects of meningococcal disease with value for paediatricians microbiologists, infectious disease specialists and professionals in public health medicine. However, since 1995 substantial progress has been made and we look back to a decade with changes in the epidemiology of meningococcal disease, improved understanding of the meningococcal population biology, new options to combat the disease by vaccination and exciting new insights into the basic biology of the meningococcus, which was stimulated by the availability of whole genome sequence data and the novel insights into cell biology. The Handbook of Meningococcal Disease covers all these aspects on the recent research on meningococci and meningococcal disease.

This book would not have been possible without the outstanding contributions of a group of internationally respected authors. We would like to thank our colleagues for giving their valuable time and effort toward compilation of this book, but we are also grateful to all those who are engaged in the intensive, and increasingly successful, efforts to eliminate this disease. We are also indebted to Andreas Sendtko at Wiley-VCH for the initial suggestion to put this book together and for the committed and stimulating support and promotion of the project.

Würzburg and Oxford, February 2006  
Matthias Frosch and Martin Maiden