

Carol Tufano

Massapequa, New York

Mother of Heather, Who Survived Meningococcal Disease

Carol Tufano's daughter, Heather, was a freshman in college when she contracted meningococcal disease, a serious bacterial infection that can strike adolescents and college students.

In October 2005, Heather came home from college for the weekend to spend some time with her family. When she left Sunday night, she felt ill and thought she may be coming down with the flu. Later that week, Heather called her mother, Carol, to tell her she had been vomiting and felt weak. Concerned about Heather's well being, her father Jerry, went to her apartment. When he arrived, he found that Heather could not walk and was developing a purplish rash. Jerry called Carol, who as a nurse had taken care of a child with meningococemia 20 years earlier and recognized the symptoms of the potentially fatal bacterial infection. She asked her husband to rush Heather to a local hospital.

By the time they arrived at the hospital, Heather's legs had begun to turn black from the infection and her kidneys began to fail, causing septic shock. Tests indicated Heather had contracted meningococemia, a form of meningococcal disease that infects the blood. Doctors had to amputate Heather's right leg below the knee and two of her fingers in order to save her life.

Carol and Jerry had Heather vaccinated against meningococcal disease when she graduated from high school, but didn't realize that even with vaccination some people may contract the disease.

Carol joined the National Meningitis Association's "Moms on Meningitis" program to help educate families in the Massapequa, New York-area about the dangers of meningococcal disease and the importance of prevention, including immunization.

A vaccine to help prevent meningococcal disease is approved for use by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration among persons aged 2 to 55 years. The vaccine protects against four of the major strains of the disease.

Anyone can get meningococcal disease, but adolescents and young adults are increased risk for contracting the disease. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends meningococcal immunization for all adolescents 11 through 18 years of age, and college freshmen living in dormitories.

"I want all parents to be aware of the symptoms of meningococcal disease and prevention methods so they can make an informed decision on how to best protect their children," said Carol.

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