

## **Jane Hession**

### **Alexandria, Virginia**

#### **Mother of Brendan, Who Died of Meningococcal Disease**

As the mother of a 17-year-old, Jane Hession was concerned about protecting her son Brendan from alcohol, drugs, and risky behavior that face young adults. She never thought she would lose Brendan to meningococcal disease, a bacterial infection that often strikes adolescents and young adults. Brendan died 16 hours after the first symptoms of the disease appeared and unfortunately, Jane learned about immunization against this devastating disease after her son died.

Early Sunday evening, Brendan complained of pain in his legs; later that night, he awoke with flu-like symptoms including vomiting, fever, aches and pains. Brendan's condition deteriorated until he collapsed the next afternoon. When Jane had trouble reviving her son, she called the paramedics.

The paramedics thought Brendan had the flu and encouraged Jane to give him fluids. Just a few minutes after the ambulance left, Brendan's father, a cardiologist, arrived home. He saw the rash taking over his son's body and immediately diagnosed Brendan with meningococcal disease. Jane and her husband Bill rushed Brendan to the hospital, where he received antibiotics. However, it was too late. The disease had progressed too far and a few hours later Brendan died. Jane sat in the hospital room and watched her bright, funny and talented son lose his fight against meningococcal disease.

Jane is dedicated to educating other parents about meningococcal disease and methods of prevention, including immunization. "Losing a child is every parent's worst nightmare. It is agony knowing immunization could have helped save Brendan's life," said Jane.

Jane joined the National Meningitis Association's "Moms on Meningitis" program to help educate other families in Alexandria about the dangers of meningococcal disease and prevention methods, 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.

"If I knew then what I do now about meningococcal disease and how deadly it can be, I would have had Brendan vaccinated," said Jane. "As a parent, you do everything you can to protect your children." Her hope is that by telling Brendan's story, no other parent will have to lose his or her child to this devastating disease.

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