

Leslie Maier

Tucson, Arizona

Mother of Chris, Who Died of Meningococcal Disease

Leslie Maier's athletic, healthy son Chris was a senior in high school and a star soccer player when a potentially vaccine-preventable infection tragically took his life. Days before meningococcal disease attacked Chris' body, he was "healthy as could be," and scored the winning goal at the Arizona state high school soccer championship on February 15, 2005.

Unfortunately, Chris' health took a turn for the worse on March 1, 2005. Chris had to leave his soccer practice early that evening and he was having a difficult time getting warm. He took a warm bath and Leslie gave him some medication for his headache and fever, as well as an extra blanket. Chris refused to take phone calls from his friends saying, "he wasn't up for it," which was very out of character for him. At around 1:30 a.m., Leslie heard Chris taking another bath and vomiting. He continued to complain that he "couldn't seem to warm his body."

The next day, Chris could not feel his legs and Leslie's husband called the paramedics, who rushed to the Maier home. A few minutes later, Chris collapsed into a coma as the paramedics rushed him to the ER. Paramedics administered CPR and medication to revive his breathing on the way to the hospital. Once at the hospital, doctors performed a spinal tap, confirming Chris had meningococcal disease. By 12:30 p.m., Chris had died.

Leslie joined the National Meningitis Association's "Moms on Meningitis" program to help educate other families in Yuma about the dangers of meningococcal disease and prevention methods, including immunization. Leslie was elected an NMA board member in 2006.

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.