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Mother of Lauren, Who Survived Meningococcal Disease

Marybeth's daughter, Lauren, almost lost her life to a serious, yet potentially vaccine preventable bacterial infection called meningococcal disease, when she was 4-years-old. Luckily, Lauren survived, but not without long term health consequences.

The morning before Halloween, Marybeth dropped Lauren off at daycare. A few hours later she received a phone call that Lauren was not feeling well, so she picked Lauren up and brought her to the doctor. Lauren had a fever and was lethargic; the doctor said she should go home and rest. Once home, Lauren was vomiting, her fever was getting higher, and she seemed nearly lifeless. When a purplish rash began to develop, Marybeth called her pediatrician again who told her to bring Lauren to the office immediately. The pediatrician recognized the symptoms as classic symptoms of meningococcal disease and told Marybeth to bring Lauren straight to the emergency room.

Once at the hospital, doctors administered antibiotics and transferred Lauren to a hospital better equipped to handle her condition. Once transferred, Lauren's kidneys began to fail and she was having trouble breathing. Lauren was placed in a coma for two weeks, and doctors had to amputate Lauren's right hand, the tips of her left hand finger and both her legs below the knee in order to save her life. Months later, Lauren underwent a kidney transplant due to complications from the disease.

Despite amputations and ongoing health issues, Lauren is vivacious and loves ping-pong, riding her bike, and playing the violin.

Marybeth had never heard of meningococcal disease and was not aware that the disease could be prevented with a simple vaccination. She joined the National Meningitis Association's "Moms on Meningitis" program to help educate other families in New York about the dangers of meningococcal disease and the importance of prevention, including immunization.

A vaccine is approved for use by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration among persons aged 2 to 55 years. 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 a dormitory due to the increased risk among this age group. The CDC also recommends vaccination for children 2-10 years of age who are at high risk for contracting the disease.

While Lauren was not within the groups recommended for vaccination, Marybeth hopes that one day recommendations will be expanded to help protect all younger children. In the meantime, she encourages parents to be aware of meningococcal disease symptoms

and urges them to consider vaccination for their adolescent and college-age children, as they are at increased risk for contracting the disease.

“We are very fortunate that Lauren survived this disease, since so many families are not as lucky,” said Marybeth. “Parents need to be aware of meningococcal disease and speak with their health care providers about protecting their children through vaccination.”