

JONATHAN DEGUZMAN

San Diego, California
Meningococcal Disease Survivor

In May 2005, Jonathan Deguzman's world was forever changed when a dangerous and potentially fatal, yet potentially vaccine-preventable bacterial infection, called meningococcal disease or meningitis, nearly took his life.

One afternoon, Jonathan began experiencing chills and figured he had the flu, so he decided to lie down in hopes that getting some rest would help him feel better. From that moment, all he can remember is being woken up by his mother, who had noticed a purplish-black rash on his hands; a common symptom of meningococcal disease. As Jonathan fluctuated in and out of consciousness, his parents rushed him to the hospital.

Jonathan awoke 12 days later from his coma to find that, in order to save his life, doctors were forced to amputate his fingers and both feet as the infection had caused gangrene in his limbs. An avid dancer, Jonathan was faced with the harsh reality that he may never be able to dance again. Unfortunately, it wasn't until after he became sick that he and his parents learned there was a vaccine available that could have potentially prevented him from contracting the disease.

Despite a long recovery and the obstacles he faced as a result of contracting meningococcal disease, Jonathan has continued to engage in the activities he loves most, especially dancing. He is a college student, double majoring in psychology and nursing, and spends much of his free time working with the National Meningitis Association to educate others about the dangers of meningococcal disease and the importance of prevention.

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

Anyone can get meningococcal disease, but adolescents and young adults are at increased risk for contracting the disease. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends vaccination for all 11-12 year olds, with a booster dose at age 16. For those who receive the first dose at 13 through 15 years of age, a booster is recommended at 16 through 18. CDC suggests that adolescents receive the vaccine less than five years before starting college.

“Given the fast-acting and dangerous nature of meningococcal disease, prevention is key,” Jonathan said. “I didn't know there was a vaccination available that could have potentially prevented me from contracting meningococcal disease, and it is now my goal to educate others so they do not have to go through the same experience.”