

## **Michael LaForgia**

### **Smithtown, New York**

#### **Meningococcal Disease Survivor**

When Michael LaForgia was 40-years-old, he contracted meningococcal disease, a serious yet potentially vaccine preventable bacterial infection. As a result of the disease, doctors had to amputate Michael's right leg below the knee and part of his left foot.

In December 2004, Michael was ushering in the New Year with his family in Maine. He woke up in the middle of the night with an excruciating headache, nausea and chills. Thinking he had the flu, Michael and his family cut their trip short and returned home to New York. The next night, Michael's wife noticed a purplish rash, which is a classic symptom of meningococcal disease, developing on his face. Michael became too weak to walk so his wife decided to take him to the emergency room.

When Michael arrived at the hospital, doctors did not know what was wrong. He was admitted to the Intensive Care Unit as he began to have trouble breathing and his liver, kidneys and other organs began to fail. Doctors told Michael's family to say their goodbyes, as he was not expected to survive through the night. Michael was soon transferred to a hospital better equipped to handle his serious condition. Doctors gave Michael antibiotics to fight the unknown infection, and after eight days in a coma, Michael's condition began to improve. However, as a result of the disease, Michael endured amputation of his right leg below the knee and parts of his left foot. He spent two months in the hospital recovering and five months in rehabilitation.

Despite these obstacles Michael, who was an avid runner prior to contracting meningococcal disease, has returned to competing in marathons and triathlons. Michael runs in honor of those impacted by meningococcal disease, those who have lost their lives and fellow survivors.

Mike joined NMA's Together Educating About Meningitis (T.E.A.M.) program to help educate others about the dangers of meningococcal disease and the importance of prevention, including vaccination. 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. 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.

"Meningococcal meningitis changed my life," says Michael. "My goal is to share my story and educate people about meningococcal disease and the importance of vaccination, so that no one else has to experience this devastating disease."

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