

Lori Buher

Mount Vernon, Washington

Mother of Carl, Who Survived Meningococcal Disease

Lori Buher's son Carl was 14-years-old. A freshman in high school, Carl had a passion for basketball and played Jr. Varsity football for La Conner High School in Mount Vernon, Washington. No one in the Buher family, especially Lori, ever thought their lives could be affected so drastically by a vaccine-preventable disease.

But on September 23, 2003, the Buhers' lives changed forever. Carl came back from a football game complaining that he didn't feel well. He ate dinner, did his homework, took a shower and went to bed. The next morning Lori went into his room to find he had been vomiting all night. Half the football team had been sick with the flu, so Carl, assuming he had caught the bug, stayed home from school. Lori stayed with him.

At 2:00 p.m., Lori got a call from her daughter Anne saying that Carl was disoriented and there were purple splotches all over his face and arms. Lori and her husband Curt immediately took Carl to the doctor, where he was diagnosed with meningococcal disease. He was transported by ambulance to Skagit Valley Hospital and treated with high doses of antibiotics to kill the bacterial infection. While being airlifted to Children's Hospital in Seattle, Carl had to be resuscitated numerous times.

Lori calls Carl a miracle, because he was not expected to survive. He was placed in a drug-induced coma for four weeks and treated with over 25 different medications to keep his body functioning. The infection caused gangrene, and Carl had to endure seven painful operations to graft new skin onto his body and both of his feet and three of his fingers were amputated. Carl was 185 pounds when he became sick with bacterial meningitis. Five months later, he came home weighing only 119 pounds.

Today, Carl is doing amazingly well, and Lori is thankful to still have her son here with her. He is helping his parents remodel their new home, practicing driving, back in school full time, and he finished his first semester of his sophomore year with a solid 4.0. The Buhers attribute their survival to a strong network of friends and family who showed amazing compassion and support while Carl was ill.

Lori joined the National Meningitis Association's "Moms on Meningitis" program to help educate other families in Mount Vernon 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.

Lori hopes by telling her story, she can educate other parents and provide them with the information necessary to make an informed decision about vaccination for their children. “It seems a small price to pay,” said Lori.

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