



PARENTS' VOICES

PERSONAL REPORTS FROM PARENTS

Amanda Kanowitz¹

Amanda was 4 1/2 years old when she developed a fever and cough. After talking with their pediatrician, her parents were told to keep giving her sips of water and make sure that she was urinating. Amanda woke in the middle of the night complaining of a stomachache. Four hours later, she was found, lifeless in her bed. Amanda died of influenza.

Peggy Archer³

Peggy has a message for all vaccine-hesitant parents. She is a Michigan nurse, but as she had a busy schedule and the Hib vaccine was relatively new, had not had her 2-year old daughter, Sarah, vaccinated against this very serious disease that can cause meningitis and other deadly illnesses. One day however, her daughter developed a cough which got progressively worse, with fever and difficulty breathing. It became so bad they Peggy and her husband took Sarah to the ER, where she was diagnosed with epiglottitis, a manifestation of Hib disease. A small tube was inserted into Sarah's windpipe and she was readied for surgery to open up her windpipe surgically and insert a larger tube to help her breathing. She was given a drug to paralyze her to prevent her dislodging the tube, but she could still feel everything. The doctor who treated remarked that this could have been prevented by vaccination against Hib. Fortunately, Sarah recovered. Peggy says that if vaccine-hesitant parents are aware of children like Sarah, who nearly lost their lives to vaccine-preventable disease, they will reconsider their decision.

Carla Newby⁵

Six-year old Jacob was a healthy boy who got along well with everyone. He awoke one morning not feeling well and during the day his fever climbed to 104.5°F. The family took him to the ER where he was treated and sent home. The next evening he complained of a terrible headache, so he went back to the ER. The doctors tested his spinal fluid and put him on oxygen. The tests showed that he had pneumococcal meningitis. He was transferred to another hospital, where he was on a respirator and became comatose. His parents were told that he would not make it, and 14 hours later he died. Jacob became infected with the pneumococcal bacteria before there was a vaccine. Today, his mother urges parents to get their children vaccinated against this disease. She believes that if the vaccine had been available, "they would not have lost him. Vaccination is very important. It is life and death."

Lynne and Phil Baker²

Lynne Baker is a member of a large family of Polish immigrants from the Detroit suburbs. When she was in the 3rd trimester of pregnancy with her third child, she developed a cough. All through labor and delivery, Lynne coughed. The baby was born and the happy couple took Nelyn home. About 2 weeks later, Nelyn began to cough, then his fingers and toes turned blue. Two days later he died, just 18 days old. An autopsy determined that the cause was pertussis (whooping cough). They could not understand this as Lynne had been vaccinated as child. But protection against pertussis is not lifelong. To protect babies, women should receive the whooping cough vaccine during the 3rd trimester of each pregnancy and others who live in the home, or have regular contact with a newborn should also be vaccinated. Then make sure that the baby receives their vaccines on schedule.

Thomas Morris⁴

"parents would never hesitate to immunize their children if they understood what whooping cough puts a child through" said Nick's father Thomas. Thomas and his wife decided not to get the 2nd dose of the pertussis vaccine because of all the stories in the media and on the internet about adverse reactions to the vaccine. They did not want to take the risk. When he was 4 years old, Nick developed a violent cough, causing him to vomit and turn blue. They feared for his life. Fortunately, with good medical care, Nick survived and is now fully vaccinated. About all the media blitz, Nick's father said that he thinks the media did a disservice by frightening parents about the vaccine without noting the risks of pertussis.

Cyrstie⁶

Cyrstie's 16-month old daughter, Cambree, has not been vaccinated. When she was 2-months old, she was found to have non-functioning liver and bile ducts, and had to have a liver transplant. The first two transplant were not successful, but the third one was. But Cambree has to remain on heavy doses of drugs which suppress the immune system so that it will not reject her new liver. But it also means that she cannot be vaccinated against diseases such as measles and chickenpox. Cyrstie is scared to think that there are parents whose decision not to vaccinate their children could put her child at risk. "Please vaccinate your children" she pleads "Please protect my child who cannot be vaccinated. And please protect your own."

Rebecca Cole⁷

"I have faced the worst nightmare any parent can possibly face. There is no experience on earth that compares to the horror and devastation of losing a child. It is shattered dreams, crushed wishes, and a future that suddenly vanishes before our eyes. It cannot be wished away, slept away, prayed away, or screamed away. It is darkness, agony, and shock. It leaves our hearts broken, bleeding, and bursting with pain, and it changes us forever. "

These are the words of Rebecca Cole, whose son, Christopher Chinnes, died aged 12 from chickenpox. He had been on corticosteroids for asthma, but these drugs also impaired his immune system so that it could not protect him against the chickenpox virus. Christopher died in 1988, before the varicella (chickenpox) had been licensed by the FDA. "Please don't get the impression" she says "that only those who are immunosuppressed can have problems with chickenpox. Anyone can. In fact about half of those who suffer complications or die each year (from chickenpox) are normal, healthy people".

Frankie Milley⁸

Frankie Milley's only son Ryan, died when he was 18 years old from meningococcal meningitis. Ryan had just graduated from high school and was a golf pro, when he started to show symptoms of a fever, aching ears, but no stiff neck, nausea or sore throat, which are typical symptoms of meningitis. Within 24 hours though he had developed red spots under his skin and was in the ER. Despite the medical team's efforts, Ryan died from meningococcal disease. At that time, the meningococcal vaccine was not recommended for healthy young adults such as Ryan. Ryan's mother has become a vocal advocate for vaccines. Frankie's mission has been to fight for children who need vaccines. She writes "As of today, I have helped to write, advocate for and pass over 18 laws across the US. My heart screams kids are still dying today in spite of all of the work. As more and more parents opt out of vaccines, this number will increase. The loss of life will be immeasurable". She goes on to say "One simply has to walk around an old cemetery to understand the value of vaccines. I have to simply look within the pain and memories of my heart to know. I believe if children had a voice and could choose between vaccine preventable diseases and a vaccine, they would choose vaccine. But they don't have a voice. We have to stand up and be that voice for children, proven science and reason, and one of life over death and debilitation. Disease kills, vaccines save lives".

Sources

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8. Frankie Milley. In Memory of Ryan Milley <http://www.immunize.org/reports/report101.asp>