

Unprotected People #96

Influenza

The Story of Katie Bellovich

The Immunization Action Coalition (IAC) publishes Unprotected People Reports about people who have suffered or died from vaccine-preventable diseases. This is the 96th in our series.

Families Fighting Flu (FFF) was established in the memory of the children who die each year from the complications of influenza. FFF member families have experienced first-hand the severity of influenza in a child, with many of the members having suffered the devastating loss of an infant, child, or teen. The mission of the non-profit organization, which is made up of families and healthcare professionals, is to reduce pediatric deaths due to influenza by raising awareness about the importance of annual influenza vaccination for children.

The following report is reprinted courtesy of Families Fighting Flu.

On the evening of Sunday, March 12, 2000, 3½-year-old Katie Bellovich developed a mild fever. As a result Katie's mother kept her home from school the next day, but she showed no other symptoms of the flu.

On that Tuesday, Katie was feeling much better. She and her mother enjoyed a fun day of playing together. However, when Katie woke up the next morning, she was feeling sick again. Her mother knew that Katie would not be able to return to school that day. She vomited once and woke up the following morning with severe abdominal pain. Katie could barely breathe when she was lying down.

Her parents later found out that the pain she was experiencing was caused by fluid building up around her heart.

Around 8:45 a.m. on that Thursday, her mother took her to the pediatrician, at which point, she noticed Katie had cold hands. Within minutes, her face and lips turned gray. She was immediately admitted to the hospital. Her condition deteriorated quickly, and Katie was lethargic within a half hour. Her heart was failing, and due to a lack of blood flow, her knees and extremities turned black.

An ultrasound found fluid near Katie's gallbladder and kidneys, in addition to around her heart. When her heart stopped, traditional CPR was attempted but ineffective; because fluid surrounded her heart, there was no room for it to expand. In an attempt to resuscitate her, the team of doctors then performed a thoracotomy (surgical incision of the chest wall), and in addition, opened her chest to manually compress her heart. For almost an hour doctors tried to revive her, but were not successful.

The autopsy revealed that Katie had died of myocarditis (inflammation of the muscular tissue of the heart) as a result of Influenza B. Katie had not been vaccinated against the flu.

For more information, visit the Families Fighting Flu website at www.familiesfightingflu.org

Disclaimer: The Immunization Action Coalition (IAC) publishes Unprotected People Reports for the purpose of making them available for our readers' review. We have not verified the content of this report.