

Unprotected People #97

Influenza

The Story of Emily Lastinger

The Immunization Action Coalition (IAC) publishes Unprotected People Reports about people who have suffered or died from vaccine-preventable diseases. This is the 97th 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 afternoon of January 28, 2004, 3½-year-old Emily Lastinger took a long nap and began to show signs that she was feeling ill. Strep throat had been circulating around her preschool, so Emily's parents kept her home from school and took her to see her doctor to make sure she was ok. However, a nurse performed a nasal swab test on Emily and determined she had the flu. She was given anti-viral medication in the hope that it would lessen the severity of the illness, and her parents were told to keep her hydrated and to control her fever.

On that Friday and over the course of the weekend, Emily became progressively worse. Her fever spiked and she began to vomit. However, Emily's pediatrician reassured her parents that these symptoms were a normal part of the flu and to just continue to make sure she stayed hydrated. Throughout the weekend, Emily continued to vomit and had trouble holding down fluids. Her parents again contacted the pediatrician's office, but they

were reassured the symptoms were normal and were told to bring her in on that Monday if they were still concerned.

Emily did not improve over the weekend so on the morning of February 2, 2004, Emily's parents scheduled a doctor's appointment for later that day. The physician instructed them to administer fluids every 15 minutes until Emily was brought in to the office. After she was bathed and dressed for the doctor's office, Emily laid down in her parents' bed to rest and watch TV. She was found lifeless 15 minutes later.

Once her parents found Emily, they immediately began to administer CPR. Forty-five minutes later in the emergency department, doctors were able to get her heart started and then transferred Emily to a local children's trauma center. For 12 hours, doctors tried to fully revive her but the damage to her system was too great. Emily died later that evening.

The autopsy revealed that in addition to influenza, Emily had pneumonia with a painful complication called an empyema (a collection of pus or fluid in the cavity between the lung and surrounding membrane). Emily had not been vaccinated against the flu.

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