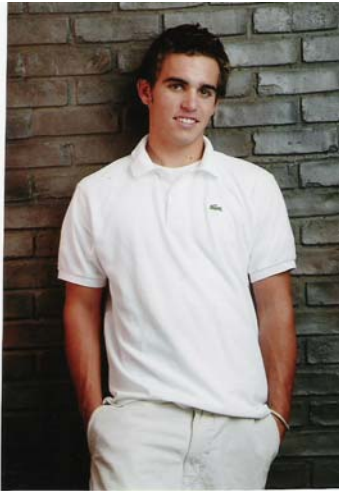


Christopher's Story



February 15, 2005, was an exciting day for us. Our son Chris Maier scored the winning goal to make Sabino High School the Arizona 4A Soccer Champions. We were on top of the world, as were all the members of his soccer team, friends, and family members. Little did any of us know that two weeks later Christopher would become ill with bacterial meningitis and be gone in less than 24 hours after experiencing the first symptoms of the disease.

Christopher was 17 years old and a senior in high school. He was looking forward to graduating and majoring in business at the University of Arizona. A talented athlete, Christopher enjoyed soccer, lacrosse, baseball, swimming and snowboarding. Most of all he loved being with people and making them smile.

After Chris died, we started finding out more about meningococcal disease. We learned that there are about 3,000 cases in America each year. Adolescents and young adults have an increased incidence of the disease. Nearly 30% of the cases occur between the ages of 15-24. One of four of those cases will result in death. Up to 20% of the survivors have long-term disabilities, such as brain damage, hearing loss, or limb amputations.

That age group is especially at risk because of lifestyle factors. Meningococcal disease is caused by a bacteria and spread through air droplets and direct contact with someone who is infected. Coughing, kissing, sharing cigarettes, utensils, cups, lip balm or anything an infected person touches with his or her mouth can pass the disease from one person to another. Being in crowded living conditions or around people from different places, as well as having irregular sleep habits, can increase the risk of contracting the disease.

Meningococcal disease is often misdiagnosed because its early signs are much like those of the flu. Symptoms may include high fever, headache, stiff neck, nausea, vomiting, confusion, and exhaustion. Later a rash may appear. If any of these symptoms are present and are unusually sudden and severe, call a physician. Don't wait.

Two weeks after Chris' death we went to a presentation for pediatricians about a new vaccine that protects against 4 of the 5 strains of meningococcal disease. Now the Centers for Disease Control, as well as several other key medical groups, recommend routine immunization for:

- Young adolescents at the preadolescent doctor's visit (11-12 years)
- High school entry or at age 15 (whichever comes first)
- College freshmen living in dormitories
- Vaccination should be made available to those who ask to be immunized.

We never knew there was a disease that could kill our healthy athletic son in less than 24 hours. If we had known about meningococcal meningitis and the vaccine, we would have had Christopher immunized and possibly have prevented his death. We will love and miss him forever but are hopeful we can prevent this loss from happening to another family.

