

SEASIDE Signal



YEAR 107 | WEEK 30

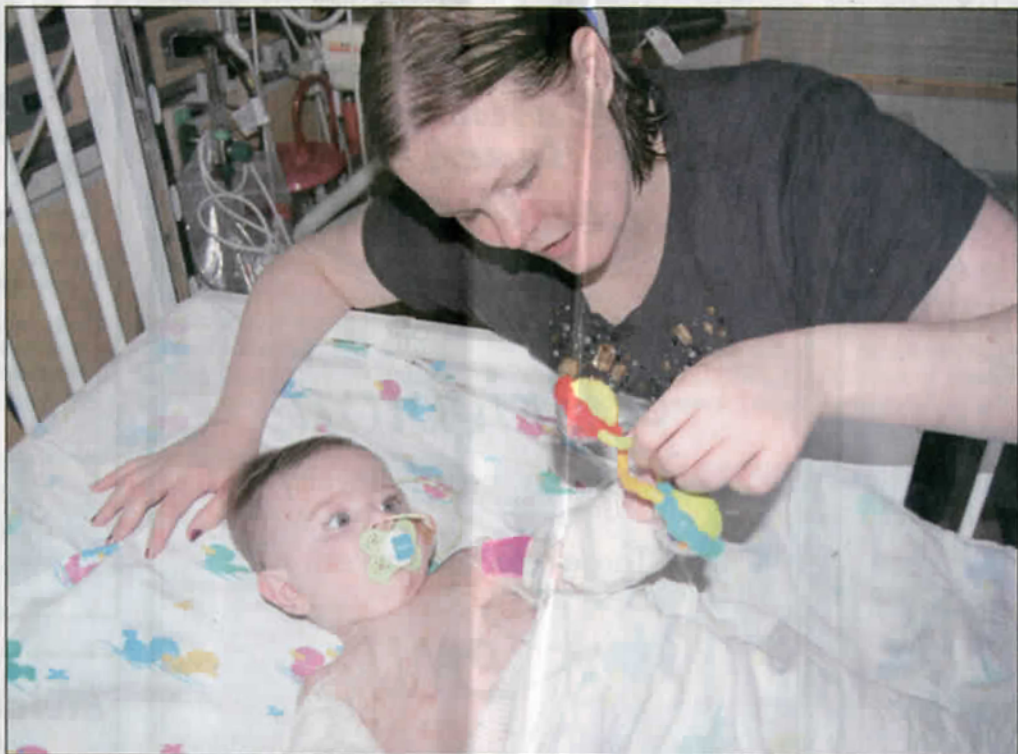
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*"She got lucky I guess. She is my real hero.
She is amazing. She is very inspirational."*

Ashley Graber, MaLea's mother

Ashley Graber is glad that her 8-month old child is still alive after contracting *Neisseria meningitidis* bacteria, which cause the blood infection meningococemia. The child lost both legs to the disease.

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Seaside infant fights deadly disease

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PORTLAND — Ashley Graber, 25, of Seaside, continues her bedside vigil at OHSU Doernbecher Children's Hospital. She's watching over her 8-month old daughter, MaLea Anne, who doctors say is lucky to be alive today.

MaLea had contracted *Neisseria meningitidis* bacteria, which causes the blood infection meningococemia. The disease can kill a child within six hours.

MaLea was rushed to the Portland hospital from the north coast after Graber noticed something wasn't right with her child the afternoon of June 12.

"She had a high fever and she just wasn't acting like herself," said Graber who was so concerned that she took the child to Providence Sea-

side Hospital. Doctors there examined MaLea and found that she had a temperature of 102-degrees.

"But they suspected a virus, like the flu," Graber said.

"So we came back home. But her temperature continued to climb and I noticed a rash developing on her body that was not there when we were at Providence. And I couldn't wake her up from her nap."

Graber decided to take the child to the emergency room at Columbia Memorial Hospital in Astoria. It was there, through Columbia's telemedicine connection to Oregon Health and Science University that doctors suspected the aggressive meningococemia disease.

Doctor Jennifer Needle, an OHSU

Want to help

Donations can be made to the MaLea Fox Benefit account at TLC Credit Union in Seaside

pediatric critical care specialist, had looked carefully at MaLea through a computer station camera at Doernbecher and knew this was a serious and life threatening case.

"This is one of the very few diseases that a child could die from in a couple of hours," said Needle.

A Life Flight helicopter dispatched to take MaLea and Ashley to Doernbecher Children's Hospital was grounded by adverse weather. An ambulance took the two to the Astoria-Warrenton Airport to board a plane that could handle the weather to Portland. MaLea arrived at Doernbecher safely and doctors quickly began to treat the child.

Needle said Graber took the right steps to save her daughter's life.

"A lot of mothers might not have reacted the same way. MaLea's

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mother immediately recognized that something was wrong with her daughter. It could have been a different outcome if she had waited a little bit longer."

She also credits Columbia Memorial doctors and nurses and the telemedicine system. She said it is an outreach that covers the entire state.

"The telemedicine was instrumental in saving the child's life," said Needle. "We recognized how sick she was getting. We receive calls from emergency rooms all over the state and we can help those doctors and nurses make the best medical

decisions even if they can't see the child. We can relay the needed information over the telephone."

Graber said the disease has taken its toll on her daughter.

"Both legs have been amputated below the knee," said Graber. "There was no blood flow and her limbs just died. It was an extreme shock to learn that they would be amputating her legs."

But Graber adds that MaLea is now recovering and her daughter is alert and occasionally smiling.

"She is doing really well," Graber said. "She has had no brain damage which is something that usually happens with this disease.

She got lucky I guess. She is my real hero. She is amazing. She is very inspirational."

It could be another month before MaLea can be sent on to The Children's Hospital at Legacy Emanuel for rehabilitation.

"She is waiting for her wounds to heal and to have skin grafts," said Graber. "She will go to rehabilitation to learn to walk and crawl again. She will have to have prosthetics for her legs. Her right arm has only partial sensation. She has a tough life ahead."

Graber has insurance that will help pay MaLea's medical expenses. Donations for the unrelated expenses Ashely faces caring for her

other daughter, 4-year old Shyann Fox, are being taken through the MaLea Fox Benefit account at TLC in Seaside.

Graber urges parents to be aware of how quickly such a life threatening disease can strike children.

Ann Thomas, at the Oregon Health Division, echoes Graber's alert to parents.

"Timing is critical," said Thomas. "This disease can strike very fast. It could just appear like a cold or a cough. But if a purplish, bruise like rash appears, you need to take immediate action."

According to Thomas, Oregon has about 35 to 40 cases of meningococemia disease annually.

"It is a slightly higher count than most states with 1 in 100,000 cases in Oregon," she noted. There is about a five percent fatal rate with the disease.

Thomas said the disease passes from person to person transmission.

"You have to have pretty close contacts," said Thomas. "Really face to face with- in about a foot for about 4 hours."

For Graber, the source of her child's sudden and life threatening disease is still a mystery.

"The doctors said she could have got it at the grocery store or just anywhere," said Graber. "We will never know how she got it."