My name is Jamie Schanbaum, and I am a GSK spokesperson and meningitis survivor. I was thriving after starting college at my dream university. I was making friends, studying hard, and greatly enjoying riding my bicycle around campus when my first semester was cut short.

It all began at a friend’s house, when I started getting chills and a headache and thought I might have the flu.

The next morning, my sister rushed me to the emergency room, to find out that I had contracted meningitis. The disease progressed so quickly, the doctors told my sister to call my mother to come to the hospital immediately. We did not know anything about meningitis, and learned about the disease the hard way.

Meningococcal disease, known as meningitis, is an uncommon, but serious illness that can cause life-threatening complications, or even death.1 Symptoms include sudden high fever, severe headache, body aches and chills, stiff neck and a dark purple rash (typically on the torso, arms or legs).2 Anyone can get meningitis, but the rates of the disease reach a peak in adolescence, with the highest rates among teens and young adults 16-23 years old.3

In 24 hours, I went from feeling completely healthy to feeling like I had the flu, to feeling too sick to move, to lying in a hospital bed, fighting for my life. At one point, I was given a 20% chance of survival. I spent 7 months in the hospital following my battle with meningitis. Ultimately, I lost 80 pounds, and had to have all my fingers, and both legs below the knee amputated in order to survive.

Facing life after amputations, I was unsure if I would ever walk again. Not only did I learn how to walk again, but I was also able to get back on my bicycle and train to join the US Paralympic cycling team and become a gold medalist. After surviving meningitis, I knew I could overcome anything that came my way.

I have made it my life's work to educate others about meningitis symptoms, risks, and the importance of vaccination to help families avoid my experience. My goal now is to make sure every young person and their parents know about meningitis and that there are two different types of vaccinations to help protect against the five vaccine-preventable groups: one for A, C, W, and Y, and another for B. I want to help other families avoid meningitis.

If you have a teen or young adult, start the conversation with your child’s healthcare provider about meningitis, and meningitis B vaccination. Find out if they’re vaccinated. Ask2BSure. Visit www.Ask2BSure.com for more information.

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