MENINGITIS NOW
PRESS RELEASE
MARCH 17, 2014

“Meningitis... I’d rather it happen to me than any child”.

I’d rather it happen to me than any child.

TYPICAL TEENAGER: I am Jacob (front, centre)

I am Jacob Gray, 22, I just had to make the agonising, life-changing choice to lose my legs after the dreaded disease almost killed me.

The above words now drive me, so I wish to bluntly and loudly discuss how meningitis changed my life and show pictures of how it enveloped me.

Why?

Because later this month the Government is set to finally decide whether a revolutionary lifesaving vaccine is made available to all babies and youngsters on the NHS for free.

The vaccine for Meningitis B — the most common form of bacterial meningitis in the UK — stands to spare thousands of lives from death and disability.

Here is my story, I am sat in my hospital bed now, a 14-month stay which began in January 2013 — the same time the vaccine received its licence for use in the UK.

I want to inspire the heel-dragging Government to act, raise lifesaving awareness by highlighting the symptoms — I want this disease eradicated to protect future generations.

This is me (above, front centre) a couple of years ago — a fun-loving, typical teenager.
I live in sleepy market town Poulton-Le-Fylde, have a girlfriend Summer Whittaker, 20, of Accrington, and enjoyed the outdoors – walking in the woods, climbing cliffs, random road trips and barbecues.

![Coupling Up: Me and Summer sharing a selfie](image)

I juggle two jobs, but for the last few years living by the coast have loved feeling the sand between my toes.

I weighed 19.6 stone (275lbs), I could carry two men on my shoulders and throw around railway sleepers as if they were sandbags.

I knew I was strong, over time it made me arrogant – even a trait I sometimes didn’t like.

But strength does not deter meningitis – the horrific disease strikes anyone, of any age and fitness – it ravages, damages and destroys relentlessly with no discrimination.

![Releventless Disease: The ‘strong man’ on life support with the rash](image)

I woke at 2am on January 10, 2013:

- Confused
- Hallucinating
Irritated by light
Soaked in sweat
Running a temperature
Aching and in pain

I felt I had flu for about a week beforehand and must stress the rash on my back (pictured) only appeared when I was being hooked up to life support.

Do not wait for a rash – it may never appear or often appears late – sometimes, by this time, it’s too late.

I felt rough going to sleep that night and just thought it was a long day – not that my body was about to quit on me.

I woke unable to move or shout ‘help’ apparently my mum heard a noise and called 999 immediately.

Next I recall fumbling out of the back of an ambulance into A&E.

I briefly walked and then collapsed, I don’t remember much after that, but was rushed to the ICU.

It was shocking how swiftly the situation escalated – only 12 hours earlier I was talking to people perfectly well, there were no signs of trouble.

Doctors soon discovered that my body was succumbing to meningitis, meningococcal septicaemia (meningitis and blood poisoning) to be precise.

Suddenly my condition worsened, I was put into an induced coma that would last 15 days.

Not long after this – one by one – my organs began to fail and all vitals stopped functioning.

I was put on life support and had two blood transfusions.

I was completely unaware of these advancing problems, I was happy in a dream world with the help of the medicines’hallucinogenic properties.
Among some truly terrifying and traumatic ones were some great dreams I often wish I could go back to such as founding Africa, leading ancient armies and driving an F1 car.

There were many abnormal dreams, but all with messages of what was going on around me.

Outside this bubble my family, including my mum Linda, 55, of Poulton, and loved ones were rushing to my bedside as I crept closer to death.

My father Kevin, 56, works abroad a lot and the doctors battled to keep me alive long enough for him to jet back from Nigeria to what seemed goodbye.

He is a dry and intimidating man, he told them to not sugar-coat answers, he wanted the numbers and facts, it’s how he works.

The medical team told everyone my chance of survival was less than 10 per cent and if I did pull through I would have lifelong mental disabilities.

I have no brain damage, they even scanned twice they didn’t believe the first result.

Doctors looked after me as if they were trying to save their own child.

Occasionally the doctors would let the coma-inducing drugs wear off to see if I would wake on my own steam.

I remember an indescribable pain when they brought me round for these brief, terrifying times.

I had no memories of who I was, in my mind I served no purpose an empty mind in distress.

My father later said that often when I woke I would be still and then with all my strength lunge from the bed, ripping the tubes out, and six people including him would pin me down as I was sedated.

After several attempts to turn my machines off, doctors tried to restart my organs and calm my heart rate.

Then one day they woke me, I didn’t move, they expected a lunge, but nothing happened.

I conquered the last hurdle, my nerves were stripped and muscles severely wasted the battle was won, but more battles were to come.
BATTLE SCARS: I lost my toes and it took months of work for me to sit up

Everyone, family, Summer, friends and even the doctors were shocked I survived.

I had dropped almost 10 stone (140lbs), about half my weight and my feet were damaged beyond repair.

I had a year in bandages the dressings had adhered to my feet, but a doctor was adamant to see what was beneath.

She pulled it off with such force she was getting out of breath and people could hear my screams down the unit the large, powerful man turned the definition of vulnerable.

I also endured more than 19 hours of operations and they initially used muscle from each thigh to pad my feet.

I lost the toes and soles of my feet, initially there was hope I would walk again with what remained and many months of intense pain followed as I tried.

The nerve damage in them disabled me from moving and there was the shape, they couldn’t support me.

But then I thought of the overall future and the pain I made the agonising, life-changing choice to have the legs removed just below the knee.
LIFE-CHANGING DECISION: To avoid more intense pain – I chose to have my legs amputated

That day was Monday, February 24 – the start of a new chapter in my life.

The world had not stopped while I was in there – I spent Christmas in hospital and even missed my best friend’s wedding – we had been friends since four years old.

When I am healed, I will return to the rehabilitation unit to focus on my goal – walking just 10 steps.

I want to beat meningitis and then work up to walking out of the hospital I walked into before collapsing.

I want to defeat the disease, I want the Government to join me and put the vaccine on the NHS for free.

You can see what it did to me and I rather it happened to me than a child – the Government have the power to stop it from happening to children.

Children like my nephews (from left) Alex, four, Toby, one, and William, six.
FAMILY MAN: Me with my adorable nephews, from left, Alex, Toby and William

For more information or to donate to the fight, call Meningitis Now on 01453 768000 or visit www.MeningitisNow.org.

ENDS

Photo Caption:

Editors Notes:

For further information please contact: Jason Hulbert, Press Officer at Meningitis Now, on 01453 769048, out of hours 07777 666518, or email jasonh@meningitisnow.org.

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**Meningitis and Septicaemia Facts**

- Meningitis is usually caused by bacteria or viruses
- Meningitis is inflammation of the membranes that surround and protect the brain and spinal cord
- Septicaemia is blood poisoning
- Some bacteria that cause meningitis also cause septicaemia
- Meningitis and septicaemia often happen together – it is vital to know all the signs and symptoms
- The early signs and symptoms of meningitis and septicaemia can be similar to flu and include fever, headache, nausea, vomiting and muscle pain.
- The more specific signs and symptoms include fever with cold hands and feet, drowsiness, confusion, pale blotchy skin, stiff neck, dislike of bright lights and a rash which doesn’t fade under pressure.
- In babies, symptoms can also include being floppy and unresponsive, dislike of being handled, rapid breathing, an unusual, moaning cry and a bulging fontanelle (soft spot on the top of the head).
There are an estimated 3,400 cases of bacterial meningitis and septicaemia each year in the UK.

Following bacterial meningitis or septicaemia, one in ten people will die and at least a third of survivors will be left with lifelong after-effects such as hearing loss, epilepsy, limb loss or learning difficulties.

Meningitis and septicaemia can affect anyone, of any age, at any time. However, babies and young children are most at risk, and young people between 15 – 24 years are also a higher risk group.

In the past 20 years, effective vaccines have been developed to give protection against SOME types of meningitis. These are offered to all babies and young children as part of the UK childhood immunisation programme. BUT there are not vaccines to protect against ALL types.

In January 2013, a vaccine to protect against meningococcal group B disease, the most common cause of bacterial meningitis and septicaemia, was licensed for use in Europe. This vaccine has not yet been recommended for routine use in the UK.

If you suspect someone may be ill with meningitis or septicaemia, trust your instincts and get immediate medical help.

For more information visit www.MeningitisNow.org or call 01453 768006. 24-hour freephone helpline 0808 80 10 388.

**About Meningitis Now**

Meningitis Now, the UK’s largest charity fighting the disease, formed after Meningitis UK and Meningitis Trust merged in April 2013.

The newly united charity, with around 30 years’ experience, shares its predecessors goals – saving lives and rebuilding futures – through research, awareness and support.

The Trust, formed in 1986, supported people facing life after meningitis.

Steve Dayman, who lost his baby Spencer to the disease in 1982, started Meningitis UK in 1999 to solely focus on funding pioneering research to find vaccines.

**Meningitis Now** is working so no UK person dies of the disease and everyone affected receives the support needed to rebuild their lives.

**Meningitis Now** fights the disease on all fronts by providing a powerful, united voice for people fighting meningitis.

- Saving lives by funding vaccine and preventative research.
- Reducing the disease’s impact through awareness.
- Rebuilding futures with dedicated support.
- Fundraising to deliver our plans.