

Stop a disease that can kill quickly

To save lives, NY State must mandate vaccine against deadly meningitis B

BY PATTI WUKOVITS

I read the news of two more meningitis B cases on a New York university campus on Groundhog Day — and like Bill Murray in the movie, it feels as if we relive this scenario over and over.

This time, it's Columbia University. But it's been elsewhere: including Syracuse, Princeton, and the University of Oregon. This list grows despite the fact that vaccines are available to fight this disease. Yes, meningitis B is preventable and has been since 2014, but not enough of our young people are being vaccinated. It's time for that to change.

For many — including my daughter, who died after contracting meningitis B — it's too late. But we need to prevent even one more case from hap-

pening. That starts with New York adding the meningitis B vaccine to the list of required immunizations students need before attending college.

In 2012, when my 17-year-old daughter, Kimberly, was a senior at East Islip High School with her whole life in front of her, she came down with what we thought was the flu. I'm a nurse, and my kids have always been up to date on their vaccines, including meningitis. So, when she turned gravely ill and the emergency room doctors at Good Samaritan Hospital Medical Center in West Islip told me they sus-

spected meningitis, I told them they

were wrong. Kim had been vaccinated. But she hadn't been vaccinated against meningitis B because the vaccination wasn't available yet.

Kim had been vaccinated with the typical meningitis vaccine, which covers only four strains of the disease. And still today, that's likely the only protection most college kids have, and it's not enough, as the recent meningitis B cases prove. Parents and students need to be aware that they need to ask

for the specific meningitis B vaccination to be fully protected against all strains of the disease.

But beyond awareness, we need to make these vaccines standard practice. I've been to Albany more times than I can count to try and impress upon our state lawmakers how critical it is that New York add the meningitis B vaccine to its list of required vaccinations. Only with that do we have a shot at keeping this disease off New York campuses and from losing more lives to a preventable disease. The threat is real: Meningitis B has been responsible for 100 percent of the meningitis outbreaks on our college campuses since 2011.

And a new study from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention comparing the rate of infection for meningitis B in college students with non-students has determined that college students are 3.54 times more likely to

become infected.

When the meningitis B vaccines became available in 2014, I was overjoyed. Finally, we could put an end to the suffering and death that this disease causes. But here we are five years later, and kids are still getting sick, and some are dying.

We're letting this disease win every day we don't have strict vaccine requirements for meningitis B. State lawmakers must step up and require complete meningitis vaccination for every student attending college in New York. We need to protect our children with both meningitis vaccines — the MenACWY vaccine plus the MenB vaccine.

I watched as this terrible disease robbed my daughter of her life. In just a few short days, she went from being a vibrant teenager to dying a horrific death. I've made it my life's work not to let another parent go through that experience. My daughter's life mattered. Our children's lives matter.

Patti Wukovits is a registered nurse and executive director of the Kimberly Coffey Foundation in Massapequa Park.



WUKOVITS FAMILY

Patti Wukovits with daughter Kimberly Coffey, who died from bacterial meningococcal disease shortly before her 2012 high school graduation.



David Hamilton, executive director of the Clean Energy Business Incubator Program at Stony Brook, next to a StorEn battery.

the use of vanadium-flow battery technology for possible home use as storage backup to the power grid.

If these guys are able to bring this technology safely and cost-effectively to the private housing market, what a great step forward in ensuring against

blackouts during power outages. Sign me up as interested!

It was refreshing to read about something positive besides train wrecks, local political corruption and Washington scandals.

Michael J. Moonitz, Massapequa

Local roads more important than parks

Instead of putting \$15 million into Nassau County parks, can we please start to do something about the condition of the roads [“\$15M makeover for parks,” News, March 6]? They are truly disgraceful.

I recently had relatives visiting from out of state, and it was embarrassing to drive them around town. They could not believe that with what we pay in taxes, our roads could be in such horrible condition. How about first doing something about the roads we need to travel to get to our parks?

Bill Wright, Wantagh

Why wasn't video from bus seen sooner?

Your story about allegations that a former bus driver and two former aides abused a boy with autism says a surveillance

camera was placed in the bus [“DA: Former bus driver, aides charged with abusing child, 9,” News, March 6].

So why wasn't video from that camera viewed daily? If it had been, this innocent child would seem to have been spared being abused multiple times. How dare someone inflict such pain! I'd like to bend back the toes of the suspects, kick them and slap their faces. And they have the nerve to deny any wrongdoing. Well, cameras do not lie!

Chris Viola-Weiss, Oceanside

No candidate wants pure socialism in U.S.

A letter writer who defined socialism as simply taking from the wealthy and giving to the less wealthy has a serious misconception about certain presidential candidates [“Concerned about socialism in U.S.,” Letters, Feb. 28].

No candidate, including

Bernie Sanders, advocates pure socialism, which means government ownership and control of all major industries, replacing private ownership.

Sanders is primarily concerned with overcorrecting insatiable greed of certain wealthy segments of society, creating a vibrant and democratic economy, providing decent living standards and health care for all, affordable college, and addressing the catastrophic dangers of climate change.

That's a far cry from pure socialism.

Fred Barnett, Lake Grove

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