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# The aftermath of pneumococcal disease

Revisiting the family of a child who survived pneumococcal disease.

THE first time Aidan's story came out was in 2011. At the time, Safinaz, Aidan's mother, told us about the harrowing tale of how her son battled to escape the clutches of pneumococcal disease.

Even after four years, the memories of Aidan's ordeal continue to linger. "I remember the whole thing like it was yesterday. As a parent, you can't help but feel traumatised," said Safinaz while giving Aidan a little kiss on the cheek.

Her feelings are understandable; Aidan was just six-months-old when he was first diagnosed with severe pneumonia.

Recently, we went back to visit Aidan and his family.

**Could you give us a summary of what actually happened?**

Safinaz: Well, it all started with what I had initially thought to be a typical cold. Aidan had all the symptoms of it – fever, cough, flu, the works.

Aidan is our fifth child. Naturally, we didn't really think there was much to worry about.

Three weeks in, and a few doses of antibiotics later, Aidan was still sick.

So, we decided to go see a paediatrician. There, Aidan's x-ray results confirmed that he was indeed suffering from severe pneumonia. It also showed there was fluid in his

tered climbing, but after the infection, he could only crawl, and we had to teach him all over again.

Today, he's quite a handful, lively and very talkative, thankfully so.

**Pneumococcal vaccine isn't a compulsory vaccine. Did this affect your decision not to vaccinate him in the first place?**

Safinaz: There is that, but I think more significantly is the fact that I was mistakenly overconfident over the protective power of breast milk and the experience I had as a mother of five beautiful children.

It blinded me to the fact that diseases/infections are unpredictable. Anyone can be affected at any time regardless of whether they have been exclusively breastfeeding

financial and emotional costs of treating this disease are much worse.

Furthermore, there's this overwhelming mentality that if something is not compulsory, than it probably isn't that serious and should be disregarded.

What's worse is that we've been conditioned to think that bad things – especially serious and potentially fatal diseases – will never happen to us because we are somehow "immune". I think this is a dangerous mindset many of us parents have, one I fervently believe we should all change for the sake of our children.

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...it also showed there was fluid in his left chest. The fluid had to be drained out with a tube when he was in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU).

**How did his illness affect the family's life?**

Safinaz: When Aidan was admitted to the hospital, I had to take leave from work for a little over a month. My husband and I had to take turns looking after him at the ward and we had to send all our other children to live with their grandparents for a while.

We were constantly scared, depressed, helpless and worried – all bundled up into one horrible feeling. Basically, life was not the same and I wouldn't want to go through something like that again.

**How has Aidan's condition improved since then?**

Safinaz: For a while, Aidan was unresponsive. He gradually showed improvement, but it was like starting back from square one.

For example, before, Aidan almost mas-

...they have been vaccinated by 23 months old one child or 10.

Vaccination is still the best way to protect your child against this disease. I certainly do not want any other child or parent to suffer like Aidan did.

**What do you say to parents who refuse to get their child vaccinated?**

Safinaz: I believe it is a choice people make for their children based on what they think is right. As a mother, I understand and respect that.

However, I also believe that we cannot ignore the scientifically proven consensus that vaccination is the most effective tool against pneumococcal infections to date.

**What other advice do you have to give to parents out there?**

Safinaz: Without a doubt, vaccinate your children! It may save your child's life and provide you with peace of mind.

Understandably for some families, getting a shot may prove to be too costly. But the



Aidan, four, was struck by pneumococcal disease when he was six-months-old. – PP