

Step-son's death sparks rabies education and prevention 'mission,' Airlie Beach, QLD

Airlie Beach father-of-four, Colin, tragically lost his step-son to the potentially fatal rabies-like Lyssavirus, earlier this year.

Lincoln Flynn, 8, passed away in February, 2013, following an encounter with an infected bat, four months earlier.

Today, Colin and his family are on a mission to raise awareness and understanding about this vaccine-preventable disease in order to help save lives. This is his story.

The fit and active little boy spent his days outside; swimming, paddling and enjoying the picturesque surroundings of tropical Long Island, where his parents worked.

"Lincoln Flynn was a happy, good looking boy who always sported a mischievous smile. He was a picture of health," Colin said.

"Temper tantrums were not his thing. He was one of those kids who people gravitated towards."



Lincoln with his mother, Michelle

In January this year, Lincoln's mother Michelle, Lincoln and his sister Lauren, 12, travelled to the Gold Coast to visit Lincoln's grandmother, where he began to experience early rabies-like symptoms.

"By the second afternoon, Lincoln had developed a slight temperature, but only to the extent that Michelle assumed it was a mild cold or flu," said Colin.

"The next morning Michelle gave him a pain reliever with a glass of water, and he asked her why she was trying to burn him? He simply couldn't handle the water.

"It was at that point she realised something was terribly wrong," Colin said.

After a short stay at the Gold Coast Hospital, bubbles under Lincoln's skin began to erupt and he was quickly transferred to the Mater Hospital, Brisbane.

It was here Lincoln fought off five doctors, demonstrating the implausible strength of the undiagnosed virus.

After many tests, including a test for lyssavirus which originally came back negative, it was decided the best form of treatment would be to place Lincoln into an induced coma and move him into the Paediatric Intensive Care Unit, where he could receive 24-hour monitoring.

According to Colin, the hospital had never sedated anyone so heavily, yet despite this, every 15 minutes, the virus would push Lincoln to break through the sedation.

Leading doctor on the case, Dr Joshua Francis, insisted they test again for lyssavirus, which this time, tragically, came back positive.



Lincoln Flynn

“I had never heard of the term lyssavirus and was relieved there was a diagnosis, hoping it would lead to treatment and a cure,” said Colin.

Yet sadly, once symptoms appear, rabies/lyssavirus is almost always fatal.

“Learning the virus was fatal was horrific. The doctors brought Lincoln out of his induced coma to say goodbye to his us all,” Colin said.

“Lincoln was having convulsions and said, “I’m not doing it,” clearly trying to fight the virus.

“His last words were, “I love you Mum, I love you Dad, please put the tube back in.” He was scared and wanted to remain sedated. He knew he was dying.”

After 28 days in intensive care, Lincoln Flynn lost his painful fight against lyssavirus.

Today, the family’s tragedy has spurred a heart wrenching mission to heighten public awareness and understanding about the importance of protecting against lyssavirus, including vaccination.

“We set up the Lincoln Lyssavirus Foundation very quickly,” Colin said.

“Our goal is to generate awareness and understanding of the virus among school age children and parents working with Queensland Health and the Department of Education, to ensure our objectives are met.



“We are proud of Lincoln. He suffered an incredible ordeal, but he is now saving lives,” said Colin.

Since Lincoln’s passing, Colin maintains the rate of vaccination against lyssavirus in Queensland has tripled.

“Lincoln did not actively seek out the bat. When brought out of his induced coma, Lincoln confirmed the bat had flown down and scratched him on the arm while playing on a tennis court,” Colin said.

In addition to taking adequate precautions to protect against rabies in tropical Queensland, Colin says it is imperative to seek pre-travel health advice prior to venturing abroad, particularly to rabies-endemic destinations, such as South East Asia.

“If Lincoln had been vaccinated against lyssavirus before being bitten, he would still be alive today. That’s what is so hard to comprehend,” said Colin.

When people head overseas to rabies-endemic regions, they heighten their risk of exposure to the virus.

“Why not get vaccinated six to eight weeks before heading abroad to have the peace of mind? It’s all about risk management,” he said.

“Ultimately, we don’t want anyone to go through what we have. Prevention is essential. It can help save lives,” said Colin.

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