

## Decision to pass up flu shot nearly cost Rolla man his life

by Jason Nordmark, Journalist at *Turtle Mountain Star*

### A decision to pass up a free flu shot nearly cost Nathan Neameyer his life.

“Getting that shot would have taken less than five minutes,” Neameyer said. “It wouldn’t have cost anything and it could have saved me from being laid up for four months of my life.”

More than two years after his experience, Neameyer said the ordeal began innocently enough. He felt symptoms of the flu coming on and remembered telling his three daughters at the dinner table that the night’s offering would likely be his last meal for a few days.



“In the past I have gotten the flu and just tried to tough it out for a few days until life gets back to normal,” Neameyer said. “Having heard that they don’t always get the right strains of the flu in the flu shot I never put any priority on getting one.”

That turned out to be a big miscalculation. Barb Frydenlund, Rolette County’s public health nurse, said even if flu vaccine isn’t a “perfect match” for a strain of the disease, it can still aid in the fight against its severity.

More than just the flu

After four miserable days battling illness, Neameyer broke down and sought medical attention.

“It wasn’t pneumonia yet but a day later I felt a change in my lungs and this time when I went back into the clinic they loaded me in an ambulance from the emergency room in Rolla after an X-ray showed fluid in my lungs,” Neameyer said.

Complications from the flu had led Neameyer from his bed at home to a bed in Altru Hospital in Grand Forks. A CT scan found his lung two-thirds full of fluid as doctors searched for a solution.

“They were having a hard time getting a culture to show what kind of infection it was. The only sure way to get a good culture was to insert a wire into my lungs but that would have risked further infection so the doctors opted to treat with an antibiotic that was more of a general antibiotic than a targeted one,” Neameyer said. “They initially had me on two IV antibiotics. Several times my blood pressure and fever was so high and due to the infection, my kidneys started to shut down that they couldn’t give me any other medications, so they had to pack ice on me to get my fever under control.”

The only thing keeping Neameyer out of intensive care was that he was still able to breathe on his own and cough out the fluid from his lungs.

Nathan’s wife, Lisa, was there to monitor the struggle. She said the first couple of weeks Nathan was exhausted and slept most of the time.

### Life-threatening circumstances

As if the threat of an intensive care stay wasn’t reason enough to worry, the Neameyers still hadn’t heard the worst-case scenario. After five weeks of antibiotics, Nathan’s kidneys were taking a beating. Doctors weren’t certain if the treatment had knocked out the pneumonia yet, but they were out of options.

“That was a particularly scary moment because the infectious disease doctor told me that five people in North Dakota had died of this condition that year,” Nathan said. “All but one were healthy people in their 30s, all of whom had gotten influenza, which turned into pneumonia, and they did not have their flu shot.”

It was ominous news for the Neameyers, parents of three young girls. Somehow, Nathan bucked the odds and began to make progress, but only after spending 15 days in the hospital under intense care.

“I was strong enough to come home but wasn’t out of the woods,” Nathan said. “I had to hook myself up to an IV with another antibiotic twice a day for another three weeks right during the time when I should have been putting my crop in. I could go to the farm for a few hours but couldn’t do any physical labor. Luckily my dad (Rocky) and a few others were able to get the job done when my livelihood was on the line.”

### **A long comeback**

Nathan was 39 at the time of his illness in March of 2013. He said it took him until the fall months of that year to fully recover.

“Just the fact that I couldn’t do anything physical for about four months was hard to recover from, not to mention the internal things,” Nathan said.

Today, the Neameyers are busier than ever with their three daughters, and life on the farm. One aspect of the ordeal, however, still haunts Nathan.

“I had never gotten a flu shot because I never get sick. Also, because I’ve heard that they don’t always put the correct strains in the vaccine, I thought it might not work anyway,” Nathan said. “Of course I was wrong. The doctors said that it was very likely that even if the vaccine wasn’t the exact strain for that year, it would still have reduced the severity of my flu enough that pneumonia wouldn’t have developed.”

If that wasn’t enough, Nathan only had to look across the table at his youngest daughter, Maggie, to learn a lesson.

“During the time I got sick, Maggie, who was 5 years old at the time, also tested positive for influenza; however since she had her flu shot she was able to recover within a few days,” Nathan said.

The Neameyers perspective of life also changed after dealing the Nathan’s illness.

“We live in a great community. Many people were praying for us,” Nathan said. “Also we had lots of help from many people and our whole family is grateful for all the assistance given during my illness.”

Nathan said he thinks about his family’s experiences at the dawn of every flu season.

“It just bothers me that I could likely have saved everyone the trouble if I would have taken five minutes to get a flu shot,” Nathan said. “I just don’t see a downside to getting it.”

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