



## About Otago

Mō Ōtākou

# A 10 per cent chance of survival

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Michael Moncur wants to emphasise to students the importance of up-to-date vaccines and communicating health concerns.

A 10 percent chance of survival was the only hope left for a student fighting for his life.

Michael Moncur was in his first year of his studies and living at Studholme College when a sudden illness took the otherwise healthy 18-year-old by surprise.

“Earlier that week I had been out playing rugby and kicked the winning goal against Arana,” the student boasts proudly.

“A few days later I had a headache. I text a friend of mine who suffers from migraines to see if it might be something like that. The Retro Party was on that night and I let one of the Studholme College staff know that I wasn’t going to be there and went to bed.”

What Michael had wasn’t a headache, it was Meningococcal B and the following hours would be the most critical in saving the teenager’s life. Studholme College Deputy Warden Rachael Carson remembers the events like it was yesterday.

“When Michael told us that he wasn’t coming to the party I thought that was a bit strange for him. We kept an eye on him that evening and the following morning it became clear to the staff that he needed an ambulance.”

Rachael recounts the great speed at which Michael’s health deteriorated.

“I messaged some people when I wasn’t well and that’s what saved me. If you let responsible people know, they can check on you. You might think it’s a harmless headache but at least that way people are aware. I wouldn’t be here if I hadn’t told a few people that I was feeling unwell.”

“During the wait for the ambulance he went downhill rapidly. He started vomiting and choking. Then he went yellow and rigid, his arms were fixed at right angles. By the time the paramedics arrived we had the defibrillator set up as we thought he might be dying in front of us. He couldn’t communicate or make eye-contact.”

The paramedic staff suggested it might be a chest infection but Rachael immediately speculated meningitis.

A few weeks earlier another student at the college had been hospitalised by the infectious virus. The vaccine that most young people receive is important in the preventing certain strains of the virus but even then does not provide life-long protection.

Michael has no recollection of what unfolded that morning and can only go on the words of the staff who were there that day. Cumberland College Warden Ziggy Lesa was one of those staff members.

“He didn’t have any spots like what you would expect to see. He was yellow and rigid and had a very high temperature. When we got him to the hospital we were told that he only had a 10 percent chance of survival.”

“We were encouraged to have students prepare memories to pass on to his parents in case he passed overnight.”

By miracle chance, Michael survived.

“I was in a coma for three days and when I woke up I somehow knew that I had had meningitis.”

Over the next 15 days Studholme College provided meals to Michael and his family as he recovered in hospital. Only whānau could visit and had to be kitted up in full Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

If it wasn’t for letting staff know that he was unwell Michael may not have survived.

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Since his recovery, the 21-year-old has gone on to become a Sub-Warden at Studholme College which he is loving every moment of. He is now in his final year of his Bachelor of Applied Science (Physical Education and Geography) and is enjoying University life.

Michael was one of three students to fall ill with Meningococcal in 2018. All three have survived to tell the tale and Michael's advice to other students is simple but important.

"Get your vaccines, including your MMR one, everything. When you live in a hall or other communal environment it's easy to pass illnesses on. If you're feeling unwell you have to stay home and you also need to tell someone you trust that you're under the weather so they can check in on you and make sure you're okay."

For more information on Meningitis visit the Ministry of Health website.

*Kōrero by Internal Communications Adviser, Chelsea McRae*