

# Family 'devastated' after 3-year-old dies from meningitis

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By Ashley Monfort

Ashland, VA (WWBT) - A Central Virginia family is in mourning after the death of a 3-year-old boy from meningitis.

A relative of Riley Crowell says the family is "devastated by the loss" of the boy from the relatively rare disease. The Chickahominy Health Department was notified of the death on Wednesday.

It is not clear where Riley was infected with meningitis. But health officials with the Chickahominy Health District are keeping in contact with families who attended his day care and had close contact with him. Letters were sent out to families who attend the For Kids Only Child Care Center in New Kent County about Riley's death. The Health Department says anyone who has had contact with Riley should see their doctor.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with the family during this difficult time," says Dr. Thomas Franck, the Chickahominy Health District health director. "Our health officials are working with the daycare center, parents and I understand that a letter has already been sent out to the parents notifying them. Those parents who have children who are identified as close contact, we are going to recommend that they receive preventative antibiotics."

The Chickahominy Health District serves New Kent, Hanover, Charles City and Goochland.

Staff members at the daycare Riley attended are now advising parents to contact their pediatricians. Since meningitis is contagious and since daycares pose a risk for spreading it, parents must be on alert.

"He was a sweet, sweet kid," said Chelsea Zahn who says she worked at the For Kids Only daycare.

"He would walk up to people and just tug on you and say 'can you hand me this'? He was a really nice kid," she added.

Thursday, representatives from the daycare sent a letter home -- saying they are working with the health department after the toddler passed away from bacterial meningitis.

"I did briefly read the letter," said parent Sara Passut.

It caught her off guard.

"My children are here all week long and this is the first I've heard of anybody being sick," she said.

Now, parents with children attending that daycare are being told to call their doctors --- and for good reason.

"That's considered a high risk because they're in a close setting for a long period of time with close contact," said Dr. Elizabeth Bigelow of Patient First.

She says the type of meningitis Riley died from is often spread from mucus or saliva.

"With children you have to be careful because they're not as good at washing their hands and they can leave the saliva on the surface," Dr. Bigelow added.

In cases like these, doctors will give any child who may have come in contact with a sick person antibiotics to try and prevent new infection.

"It is a lot easier to prevent the child from getting meningitis rather than treating the child once they have meningitis," Bigelow suggested.

The whole situation finds parents on edge following the sad death of a cute toddler.

"I have my daughter in the car right now and to think that she went last week and honestly I'm going to have to go get her tested because you never know," Zahn said.

Riley's grandfather told NBC12 he believes Heaven has another angel. A staff person from the daycare refused to comment about the situation and asked our crews to leave the property.

There are around 1,000 cases of meningococcal meningitis a year in the US. The bacteria causes membranes covering the brain and spinal cord to become inflamed. It can result in death, brain damage, paralysis or other complications.

Relatives say they lost their grandfather just one month ago and [created a GoFundMe page](#) to help with expenses.

"Our family is devastated by the loss and trying to figure out how to come up with the money makes it that much more difficult," a cousin wrote in an email. "If there's any way you could help it would be greatly appreciated!"

**The best treatment is to act quickly if you see symptoms, including:**

- General poor feeling
- Sudden high fever
- Severe, persistent headache
- Neck stiffness
- Nausea or vomiting
- Discomfort in bright lights
- Drowsiness or difficulty awakening
- Joint pain
- Confusion or other mental changes
- A reddish or purple skin rash is a very important sign to watch for. If it does not turn white when you press a glass against it, the rash may be a sign of blood poisoning. This is a medical emergency.

**Other symptoms of meningitis or blood poisoning may include:**

- Tense or bulging soft spot (in babies)
- High-pitched or moaning cry (in babies)
- Stiff, jerky movements or floppiness (in babies or toddlers)
- Irritability
- Fast breathing
- Lethargy or excessive sleepiness
- Blotchy skin, turning pale or blue
- Shivering, or cold hands and feet
- Seizure

If you think you have meningococcal meningitis, call 911 or go to the emergency room. Tests can help doctors start antibiotics or provide other medication, such as steroids. If you come into close contact with someone who has meningococcal meningitis it is very important to get antibiotics to prevent infection.

The bacteria which causes meningococcal meningitis is spread through saliva or spit, for example coughing or kissing. It can also be spread if you're around someone infected for a long time, such as living in the same house.

The bacteria is not spread by breathing the same air or casual contact, and is not as contagious as the cold or flu.

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