

HEALTH

Teen survives deadly bacteria

BY KATHLEEN GRIFFIN
Staff Writer

A 16-year-old Markham boy is alive today thanks to the quick action of Markham Stouffville Hospital emergency staff, his mom says.

Matthew Murphy, a Brother Andre Grade 10 student, is recovering at The Hospital for Sick Children after surviving a life-threatening bout of meningococemia Easter Sunday.

Meningococemia is the same virulent and deadly bacteria as seen in meningococcal meningitis, only in Matthew's case it attacked the bloodstream, rather than the tissue lining the brain.

Sonja Murphy is more than grateful. She knows Matthew would have died without the quick diagnosis of the emergency department staff, especially a nurse named Irish.

"She seemed to take one look at him and figured out how sick he was very quickly," Murphy said. "Everyone there was quick-thinking, kind and compassionate. I think people should know they are there when it really counts."

The hospital would not release Irish's last name.

Matthew began feeling sick early Sunday morning, complaining of fever, vomiting and diarrhea. By Sunday night he was extremely ill — one of the reasons this scary disease is so deadly.

"He got up about 8 p.m. to go to the bathroom," Murphy said. "His feet were blue and he had spots on his skin."

The spots are called petechia and it's a common symptom of septic shock.

Murphy decided to take Matthew to hospital, but before they could get downstairs, he collapsed. An ambulance was called.

When Matthew arrived at Markham Stouffville, Irish rearranged patients so Matthew could have a room. Staff, including Dr. Wendy Iseman, worked frantically to stabilize him.

"The triage nurses recognized how sick he looked," said Dr. Larry Pancer, the on-call pediatrician who saw Matthew that night. "In any success story, there are many people and many disciplines that make a difference. First credit goes to the parents who intuitively realized how sick he was."

"Everyone keeps telling us how serious it was, that timing is everything, that had we not brought him in he wouldn't be with us anymore," Murphy said.

"Over the years we have done very, very well at recognizing and dealing with meningitis here," said interim CEO Dr. Jim McLean. "I've worked in many hospitals and I don't think I've seen a better job than our staff here."

Intravenous fluids and antibiotics were started immediately. Matthew was in and out of consciousness, delirious at times, disoriented. Once stabilized, he was airlifted to the Toronto hospital, where he will remain another 10 days.

Matthew's case is an isolated one. The incubation period of one to ten days is past and no other cases have been reported, said Karen Hoare of the York Region Public Health Department.

She added people with flu-like symptoms that develop into extreme lethargy, confusion, a stiff neck or rashes should be seen by a doctor.

The disease progresses incredibly quickly, becoming life-threatening within hours. Patients go into shock, blood pressure drops, kidneys start to fail and the heart pumps less and less blood. To conserve energy, the body begins directing blood to the vital organs, leaving extremities like hands and feet with no blood supply.

"If he had gone to bed and waited another 12 hours, they wouldn't have been able to wake him. By morning he probably would have been dead," Pancer said.

Matthew may still lose portions of the toes on his right foot but at one point doctors thought the entire foot would be at risk. His fingertips remain black, although doctors are optimistic they may recover in time.

But, as Pancer said, "it beats the alternative."



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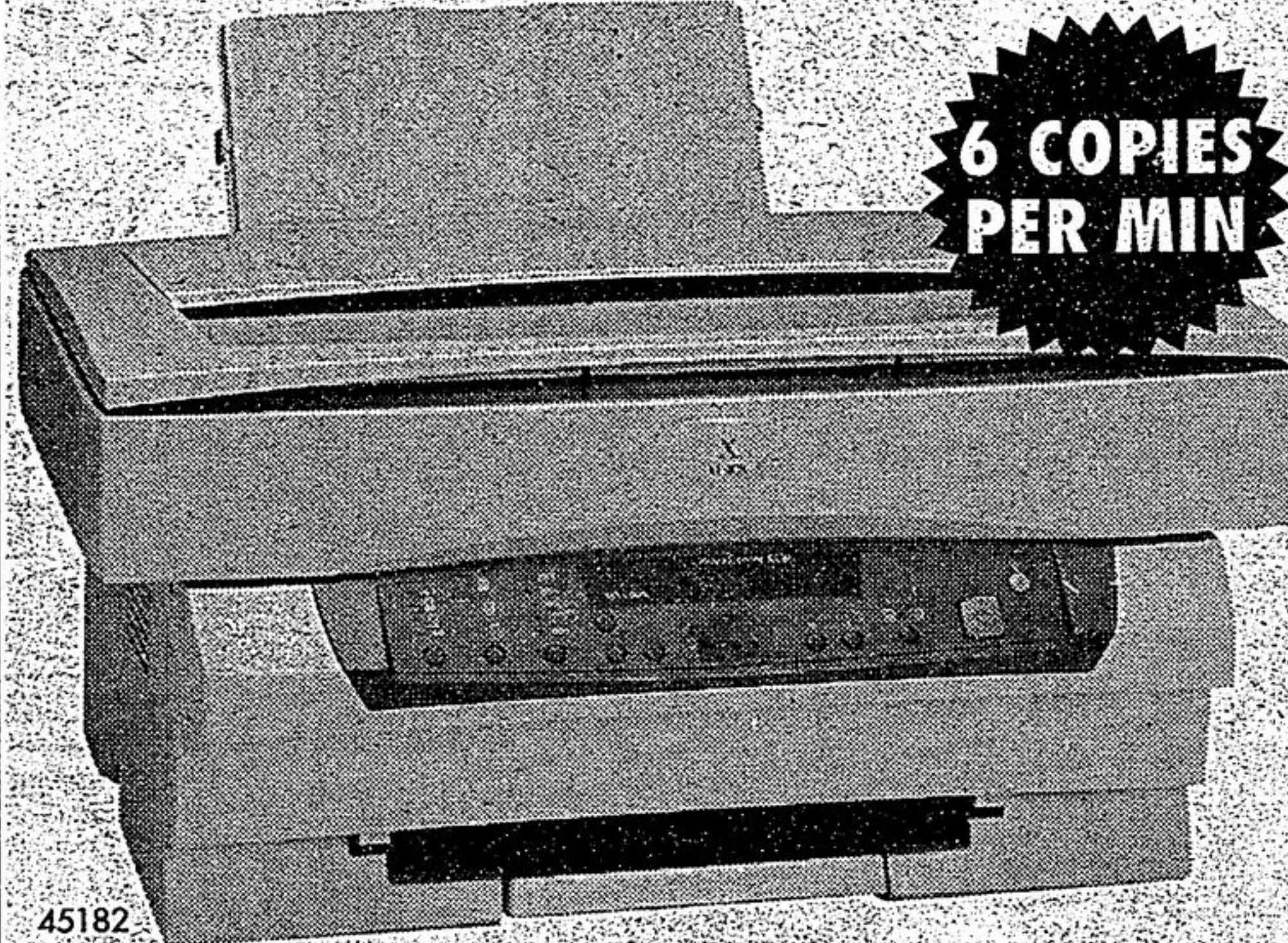
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