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# Parents of E. coli kid 'raised the flag'

BY LISA QUEEN  
Staff Writer

**"I don't know if (York Region public health) would have made it public if I hadn't said anything."**

— Shelly Suter

After taking care of their extremely ill daughter, the most important job Les and Shelly Suter assigned themselves was educating the public about the deadly dangers of E. coli.

But the Newmarket parents are wondering why that responsibility was left to them.

While three-year-old Justine Suter lay lethargic in her bed at Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children late last month, her little body fighting the effects of the same E. coli that killed seven and left more than 2,000 people ill in Walkerton two years ago, Mr. and Mrs. Suter spoke about how the bacteria had almost taken their daughter's life and threatened to leave her kidneys permanently damaged.

With the cause of Justine's illness still unknown, Mr. and Mrs. Suter warned

parents about the dangers of allowing their children to play in potentially contaminated streams and the risks of eating improperly cooked hamburger.

As a former employee of the York Region Newspaper Group, Mrs. Suter was quick to alert the local media about Justine's illness because she wanted local parents to recognize both the potential dangers and the symptoms to look for if their children contracted the bacteria.

"This story has to get out quickly and raise the flag," Mrs. Suter said just days after Justine was struck by E. coli April 24. If not for Mr. and Mrs. Suter, Justine's illness would never have come to light.

Mrs. Suter now wants to see York Region's public health department — whose mandate is to promote the health of residents — review how it releases information publicly about health threats to residents.

"I don't know if they would have made it public if I hadn't said anything," she said, adding the department issued general information about symptoms and causes of E. coli only after the family alerted the public about Justine's condition.

"I think (disclosure of cases involving risks to public health) should be mandatory. Instead of you guys (reporters) having to stumble on it, there should definitely be a public notice."

Bill Mindell, director of the York Region public health department's infectious diseases control, said the unit must walk a fine line when it discloses information about outbreaks of illnesses.

He said public health departments must protect the privacy of individuals to ensure hospitals, doctors and patients report illnesses.

In the case of Justine, it was an isolated case of E. coli and public health determined there was no need to dis-

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