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The New Zealand Herald

Her body began shutting down

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Lucy doesn't plan on getting the vaccination this year. Photo / Michael Craig

Lucy Janisch-Fitzgerald has just returned from an evening run in the rain. It is cold outside but her body is heated by the energy she has expended. Her hair is damp, her clothes wet with sweat and rain. She doesn't know it yet, but her winter run has provided the ideal hotbed for an influenza virus to incubate.



The 23-year-old goes to bed and, the next working day, goes back to her job as a retail manager. But a few days later, Lucy's temperature rockets. She begins coughing up blood and shivering uncontrollably.

She is rushed to Auckland Hospital's intensive care unit and placed on breathing machines as her lungs begin to shrivel like a deflated balloon. "You feel your body shutting down and you are continually nauseous," Lucy says. "You literally feel like you are dying."



It is July 2012 and Lucy is diagnosed with pneumonia and a new strain of H3N2 influenza that has doctors stumped. Lucy's condition declines rapidly and doctors do not have the antiviral to kill the virus. Her only chance is a trial drug that contains similar strains of the swine flu.

Lying in a sterile and isolated room, doctors pump in the clear fluid through an intravenous drip. "Within an hour, I improved. I went to a general ward the next day and from there I kept improving."



Lucy hadn't had a flu jab because she considered herself healthy. And she paid the price: she was one of 1055 people hospitalised during New Zealand's worst flu epidemic since the swine flu that killed 49 people in 2009. Lucy doesn't plan to get the vaccination this year, either.

"I'm hoping my immunity has built up," she says. "I don't feel that strongly about putting unnecessary things in my body."

- Herald on Sunday

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