

Parents read lips of woman with flesh-eating bug

May 14 2012

(AP) -- The parents of a young Georgia woman battling a flesh-eating bacterial infection said Monday they've learned to read lips and are communicating with their daughter despite a breathing tube in her throat.

Speaking on NBC's "Today" show Monday, Andy Copeland said his daughter Aimee told them she was thirsty, and that ice cream was the first thing she wants when she's able to eat on her own.

"We just take it each day at a time," he said. "My daughter's strong, she really is."

Aimee Copeland, 24, has already lost most of her left leg and will lose her fingers. Doctors hope to save the palms of her hands, which could allow her to someday use prosthetics, her father said in an online update.

"Aimee is alert and trying to mouth questions," Andy Copeland wrote on a website created to provide updates to friends and supporters. "Her [breathing tube](#) has been reoriented to increase her comfort and allow them to try to read her lips. She said: 'I can't talk!' We told her it was because of the tube, and we explained the need for it. 'Take it out!' She also asked 'What happened?' and 'Where am I?'"

She contracted the [rare infection](#), called necrotizing fasciitis, after falling from a broken zip line and gashing her leg on May 1.

She was in [critical condition](#) Monday in the Joseph M. Still Burn Center at Doctors Hospital in Augusta, hospital spokeswoman Stacey Snyder said.

Infections by so-called flesh-eating bacteria are rare but sometimes can run rampant after even minor cuts or [scratches](#). The affliction can destroy muscle, fat and [skin tissue](#). The bacteria that infected Copeland is called *Aeromonas hydrophila*.

Aimee Copeland hasn't been told of the exact extent of her injuries, but she has asked how long she has been in the hospital, her father told the "Today" show.

When told that she's been hospitalized for several days, she expressed concern about completing coursework at the University of West Georgia, where she's a graduate student, her father said. She also worried about missing work at a cafe in Carrollton.

More information: <http://uwgpsychology.org/2012/aimee-copeland/>

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Citation: Parents read lips of woman with flesh-eating bug (2012, May 14) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-05-parents-lips-woman-flesh-eating-bug.html>

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