



HAWAI'I COVID-19 JOINT INFORMATION CENTER

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HONOLULU WOMAN'S POWERFUL STORY OF SURVIVING COVID-19

HONOLULU – There was a time, in the spring, when Sarah Bolles of Salt Lake thought she was going to die. Diagnosed in the early weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic she credits excellent health care, her faith, and the support of her family for her survival. It was definitely touch and go, and in a recent interview she reflected on just how close she was to death's door, her struggle to overcome the insidious coronavirus, and now six months later, her continuing physical and emotional struggles.

Sarah is not sure how she was infected, but she thinks it was probably in Waikīkī, prior to widespread lockdowns and restrictions.

Her first symptom was a headache, quickly followed by a fever...a really high one of 104.3 degrees. On her first trip to Kaiser Permanente at Moanalua she was tested for COVID-19 and got the results back five days later. Her respiratory results were normal, but while she waited for her test results, she started experiencing shortness of breath. "I just remember that day being at home and being scared and not being able to breathe. I thought, I have to call 911," Bolles said.

She said AMR responded very quickly and she was back at the hospital within ten minutes, where she had another coronavirus test. "It was a surreal time for me because I thought, I'll never get to see my family again. They're going to sedate me; they're going to put me in a coma. It happened so fast."

Fast forward three-weeks, the amount of time she spent in a medically induced coma. When she woke up, she said she was in a complete state of shock. Altogether she spent about a month and a half in the hospital.

Sarah is 34 years old, the single mother of a 13-year-old daughter, Mia. She does have some underlying medical issues but is not in the most-vulnerable age group. She commented, "When I first got sick, I wasn't thinking COVID-19. I'd heard about the virus and that it was going around. Now, when you actually experience this disease yourself or know someone who has it, you realize just how severe it is." She implores everyone to wear masks and to physically distance. "Just think about the lives that you are saving when you are thinking about others and not just yourself," she said.

Bolles fully supports previous and current emergency rules and restrictions as necessary to stop the spread of COVID-19 as quickly and effectively as possible. She commented, “We need to keep our hospital beds available for those who have other urgent health issues.”

Since being home, she’s had the opportunity to talk to her daughter about the disease and encourages all parents who have children and teens to do so. “They need to realize this not only affects the elderly or vulnerable but can strike any of us down at any time.”

She credits the excellent medical care she received, her faith, and her family for getting her through what she believes was a near-death experience. Asked about her long-term health, recovery and plans, she said, “I have several friends who’ve contracted the virus. I had underlying issues and not all of them do. I have one friend who will need a breathing machine for two years. I need to keep working on my breathing exercises as I know my lungs are scarred. But beyond the physical ramifications of having had coronavirus, the emotional toll is longer-lasting. The isolation, the loss of employment and the limited mobility seems worse than the physical impacts.” It’s a double whammy and by telling her story this young survivor hopes everyone in Hawai’i takes seriously the need for safe practices and the temporary restrictions and inconveniences necessary to bring COVID-19 to its heels.

RESOURCES

(Images/video courtesy: Hawaii COVID-19 Joint Information Center)

HD video- Full interview with Sarah Bolles (August 10, 2020):

<https://vimeo.com/446658767>

Photographs – Sarah Bolles (in hospital and 8-10-20)

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/oundcd893lin88j/AAAVJgMaok5JRZW_rkrlsW-ta?dl=0

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