

MRF Media contact CHELTENHAM, Gloucestershire

Miss Cheltenham warns: Babies under one hit hardest by meningitis and septicaemia.

My name is Victoria Iliina. I am Miss Cheltenham 2009-2010. I had meningococcal meningitis and septicaemia when I was only five and a half months old. I became ill extremely quickly and spent three months in hospital.

As I was only a baby I don't remember anything about my experience with meningitis. I learned about it from my mum, Svetlana, who looked after me when I was in hospital.

Mum tells me that I was so ill that every day I was on two or three drips, and I had lumbar punctures – a needle inserted into my spine to draw off fluid to help diagnose meningitis. We were told that my condition was extremely serious, and that there was a good chance that I might not make it. I'm so thankful that I survived and my mum says she feels blessed that I pulled through.

I have suffered after-effects as a result of meningitis. I lost my hearing a few months after I was discharged from hospital but it hasn't stopped me from achieving the things I want in life. I became Miss Cheltenham 2009-10 and was runner-up in Miss Deaf UK 2008.

Quote for media use: Victoria says: "I had meningitis in 1986 aged just five and a half months. I became ill very quickly and was rushed to hospital. I spent three months recovering and lost my hearing, but luckily I survived. Meningitis and septicaemia are devastating diseases, and babies under one year old are the most at-risk group. Two babies die every week from the diseases and many more are left with serious after-effects which can last a lifetime. I'd urge parents and carers of young children to visit the MRF website or call their helpline for free symptoms information. It only takes a minute, but it could save a life. That's why I'm supporting Meningitis awareness week."

Willing to do: Victoria and mother Svetlana will appear for Press, Radio, TV but note that Victoria is deaf as a result of meningitis.

If you'd like to speak to Victoria and mum Svetlana, contact the MRF Communications team: 01454 281811