



BOB HALLINEN / Anchorage Daily News

Tate Hart, 6, came down with swine flu, which turned into pneumonia. He then developed Guillain-Barre syndrome. His parents, Anne Gore and Dave Hart, use their experience to urge people to vaccinate their children against the flu.

## Boy stricken with serious illnesses recovers after months of therapy



## SWINE FLU: Tate Hart develops a love of skiing during his rehabilitation.

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On a Friday morning, Anne Gore's and Dave Hart's pediatrician told Gore to prepare for a lousy weekend — their two small boys, Tate and Luka, had swine flu.

Instead of a lousy weekend, the Anchorage couple endured weeks of fear and months of struggle. Tate's flu brought on pneumonia. A doctor told Gore and Hart their son might not make it.

Then, just as he was recovering, a third, scary and hard-to-diagnose disease struck: Guillain-Barre syndrome, a rare condition that can cause paralysis and sometimes is triggered by an infection like flu.

Guillain-Barre left Tate, only 5 years old then, helpless in a wheelchair. He was so frustrated he had screaming tantrums. So sick and depressed that at one point he told his father he didn't want to get better. The trauma began Oct. 22, 2009.

Gore and Hart are talking about it now because they want to urge parents to get their children vaccinated against the flu. "What may be perceived as 'just flu' can, with little apparent rhyme or reason, change a life," wrote Gore in an e-mail.

### 36 HARD HOURS AT HOME

Tate began crashing the same night the family learned the children had the flu. His eyes glassed over. He labored to breathe. At Providence Alaska Medical Center, a doctor diagnosed pneumonia and began aggressive treatment with antibiotics, Tamiflu, oxygen and other lung treatments.

Hart remembers a doctor saying, "There's nothing more we can do. We can make him comfortable. But he may die."

It was the start of "sheer terror for two whole weeks," said Hart.

Four to five days later, Tate had improved enough from the pneumonia and flu that the hospital sent him home. The doctors didn't know about the other problem.

Tate was home for just 36 hours.

Gore, who slept next to him the first night, said he woke up about every 45 minutes complaining his legs hurt.

Early in the morning of the second night, they rushed him back to Providence.

### PUZZLED DOCTORS

In the hospital, doctors didn't know what was wrong.

Even so, they soon wanted to get Tate to move. They wheeled him to physical therapy and stood him up. Tate just shook, said Gore.

A low point for Hart: Medical staff gave Tate drugs to knock him out, and while he was out, stuck a long needle in his spine — a test called a lumbar puncture. They also did an MRI, and put in a feeding tube.

About six days after Tate's return to the hospital's pediatric intensive care unit, children's neurologist Dr. Rod Smith told the couple it might be Guillain-Barre syndrome, said Gore.

It's a rare disorder in which a person's immune system attacks his nerves.

First, a person's extremities get numb and weak, says the Mayo Clinic website. Then the weakness spreads throughout the body, and can become paralysis. The causes are unknown, but in most cases the syndrome follows an infection of the lungs or digestive tract, the Mayo Clinic says.

Most people eventually get over it.

### WHEELCHAIR STRUGGLES

When Tate was discharged, he was like a baby, his parents said. He couldn't walk or even sit up. His skin was so sensitive, it would only tolerate soft fleece. He didn't want to eat.

"I don't think he lacked the ability to move. But physically he couldn't move because it was so painful," said Gore. "Because he couldn't and wouldn't move, the muscles started to atrophy."

Gore took leave from her state job, coordinating breast and cervical health care programs around Alaska, while Hart, a petroleum engineer, continued working.

Her lowest moments were when Tate was in the wheelchair. "I remember thinking, 'Is he going to get better?'"

Tate was taking all kinds of medicines around the clock. One of them came with the warning, "May cause suicidal ideation" — thoughts of suicide.

### TATE'S SCHOOL RALLIES

The kindness and assistance of others kept them going.

★ Gore calls the therapists at All for Kids Pediatric Therapy Clinic "miraculous lifesavers." ★

Tate first went to the therapy clinic in early November, within two days of leaving the hospital.

The therapists taught him to walk again. They did it with play therapy, games, a swing that hangs from the ceiling, slides, a bucket of beans to stick his feet into to feel the sensation.

It took months. He was able to bear weight by Christmas. He took

a few steps beginning in January, and by the end of the month was using a walker. He kept progressing gradually until August of 2010, when he graduated from therapy.

The parents, staff and children at Anchor Lutheran School, where Tate was a prekindergarten student, did so much for the family that thinking about it brought tears to Gore's eyes. Teacher Suzanne Haidri and others made a book that told Tate's story and how important it was for him to get better, Gore said. The school tape-recorded an assembly with kids shouting, "Get well, Tate!" They sent letters. People delivered grilled pork chops with lime sauce, a secret special meatball sauce, chilies, stews — their best recipes.

Then in December, two months after his ordeal began, Tate started skiing with Challenge Alaska, a nonprofit group that adapts sports for people with disabilities. He started just sitting in a sitski and going down the mountain, and worked his way up from there.

"It was something to look forward to every week," said Hart.

And it ignited a love of skiing.

### SKIING ON HIS OWN

In August, said Gore, Tate asked how much longer he'd be going to the therapy clinic. She asked, found there was a waiting list of other children who needed the services, and decided to end it.

Now, Tate, 6, and Luka, 4, both skinny kids, seem to run around as much as any other small boys. Tate didn't want to talk about how he felt in the hospital. He had other things on his mind.

Last weekend the family was going skiing. Tate planned to go from the top of Alyeska down.

The family still worries. Tate had a fever this week, though his flu test came back negative.

They all got their flu vaccines last fall. Except Tate. He can't be vaccinated for fear of a recurrence of Guillain-Barre. That's another reason why they hope the people around him will be vaccinated. That's his best protec-



Tate went onto the stage when Lisa Murkowski announced she would run a write-in campaign for the U.S. Senate on Sept. 17.