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EXCLUSIVE

## Mom Who Went into Cardiac Arrest Weeks After Giving Birth Warns: 'Pay Attention to Your Body'



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Without LifeVest,  
I would not be  
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# Mom Who Went into Cardiac Arrest Weeks After Giving Birth Warns: ‘Pay Attention to Your Body’

EMILY ZAUZMER December 04, 2018



Bobbi Leverette and family

Bobbi Leverette was about 5½ months pregnant when she noticed that she was having difficulty breathing and lying down flat at the same time.

“That was the first time that I noticed that something wasn’t right,” Leverette, 34, tells PEOPLE. “I did speak to my doctor ... and he just said, ‘That’s just a pregnancy symptom. It’s normal.’”

After Leverette, a correctional officer in Dallas, gave birth to baby Journii on June 22, she would learn that she had peripartum cardiomyopathy, a condition that sent her into sudden cardiac arrest in July.

Before her diagnosis, the underlying cause of her health problems went unexplained.

In the weeks following the ultrasound, Leverette learned that she had gestational diabetes and preeclampsia. “And around 6½ months, they were looking for breathing patterns in the baby, and she wouldn’t practice breathing for anything,” Leverette recalls. She spent a few days in the hospital before she was sent home.

“They were planning to deliver me early because they could tell something wasn’t right, but they still didn’t know at the time what was going on,” Leverette says.

“After she was born [via C-section], that’s when things started to escalate.”

Leverette’s clue that something was amiss was all the swelling — even though a nurse told her it was nothing to worry about. “From my waist down to my ankles was really, really swollen,” she explained. “I was getting more and more swollen. [I had] never been this swollen before in my life.”

Two weeks after Journii, who spent time in the NICU, arrived, Leverette was at home with her baby and her 10-year-old daughter A’lyah when her health hit a low point. “I could not go two feet in front of me without being able to breathe,” she says. “I was sweating profusely. It was horrible.”

At the hospital, she learned that she had peripartum cardiomyopathy.



Bobbi Leverette’s family



Bobbi Leverette’s family

“It was such a relief to finally have a doctor that said, ‘Hey, I know exactly what this is,’” Leverette says.

“Everything escalated so quickly. Without the LifeVest, I would not be here because there would have been nothing to bring my heart rhythm back down to a normal level.”

According to the American Heart Association, peripartum cardiomyopathy, which affects between 1,000 and 1,300 American women per year, “is an uncommon form of heart failure that happens during the last month of pregnancy or up to five months after giving birth.”

Her doctor recommended a LifeVest, an external defibrillator that a heart patient wears at all times except bathing. LifeVest’s website notes, “The LifeVest continuously monitors the patient’s heart and, if a life-threatening heart rhythm is detected, the device delivers a treatment shock to restore normal heart rhythm.”

On July 18, Leverette went into sudden cardiac arrest, and the LifeVest revived her.

“Everyone’s already in bed. A’lyah’s in bed. Journii’s in her bassinet. And my husband is on his way home,” she says. “I’m in bed on my cell phone, and I blackout. When I come back to, I hear my LifeVest deploying.”

“I am so grateful [to the LifeVest]. I can’t even put into words how grateful,” she reflects. “Everything escalated so quickly. Without the LifeVest, I would not be here because there would have been nothing to bring my heart rhythm back down to a normal level.”

Her husband Irindric came home and rushed her to the emergency room, where doctors implanted a defibrillator in her chest five days later. She has since gone back to work and says that her condition is improving.

“A lot of the time I’m weak, I’m kind of sluggish, but I also have my good days where I have full energy,” she continues. “It’s getting better. I can see the light at the end of the tunnel.”

Journii, almost 5 months old, is doing well. “She is amazing,” Leverette gushes. “Even though she is a NICU baby, you never really could tell. She was small, but now she’s about 13 lbs. ... She’s meeting all her goals as far as what she’s supposed to be doing at her stages.”

Leverette has a message for women experiencing pregnancy complications like she did: “Do not ignore how you feel. Pay attention to your body. Your body will let you know when something is wrong. Be an advocate for yourself.”

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