

A YOUNG professional footballer from Watford was rejoicing in being alive this week after he picked up the potentially fatal meningitis bug.

Alan Beeton, 20, of Ganders Ash, Watford, was struck down by the disease last Wednesday after complaining of pounding headaches, nausea and feeling cold.

By Thursday afternoon, he was in isolation at Watford General Hospital on antibiotics to tackle the infection after his doctor became concerned he was not responding to more conventional analgesics for pain and temperature relief.

Quick-thinking doctors at the hospital treated him for the more serious bacterial strain of the disease while they waited for the results of a lumbar puncture which draws fluid from the spine. The results showed the young man had the viral strain, which is the less serious of the two.

Beeton, who plays for Wycombe Wanderers in Nationwide Division Two, said: "This is, without a doubt, the worst thing that has ever happened to me. When the doctor told me I had to go to the hospital for meningitis tests he said he had to prepare me for what the effects could be.

"I was warned I could suffer brain damage or go deaf. I was so scared I thought I was going to die. "Now I know how lucky I've been. It's important to enjoy life while you can, this has made me realise how quickly things can go wrong and how your life can end just like that.

"Thankfully for me, I have got another chance and I intend to use it."

His father, also called Alan, believes it was the rapid reaction of the doctor and hospital staff which helped save his son's life.

He said: "It is thanks to them that he is okay. We were woken in the middle of the night by Alan saying he was being sick and thought he might pass out and then we find he's got this terrible disease.

"We are thankful the doctor thought to get him into hospital sooner rather than later and that they opted to treat him as if it was the more dangerous infection of the two. The treatment tackled the viral infection so well.

"Although we are all right now,

by Yana De Silva



Alan Beeton: fit again. S302406

the family has been completely shaken by this and still are."

Beeton, who plays at left-back, was allowed home on Tuesday and has been warned he will need time to recover and get his full strength back, but the young footballer is keen to get back into training ready for the new season.

He said: "My back still really hurts from the lumbar test and I can't drive and have to take it easy going up stairs because I get dizzy.

"But I am keen to get back for pre-season training so that I don't miss out too much.

"The doctor has told me that this won't affect my long-term health and career but I'll have to wait to see if I can get the go-ahead to start training."

Beeton, who attended St Michaels School in High Elms Lane, Garston, was captain of the school team which won the Snickers Under-16 Group championship.

From school, he went straight to Wycombe Wanderers, where he served his apprenticeship before turning professional with the club two years ago.

He fell sick just hours before the team was due to fly out to Ireland for a pre-season friendly. The rest of the team has since been tested and given the all clear, but Beeton has missed four matches.

REPORT

By Dave Peters

BLUES star Alan Beeton was in his back garden kicking a ball around less than 24 hours after he was released from hospital following his meningitis scare.

The 20-year-old defender, who thought the illness was going to kill him, is in a rush to get back into action and grab his second chance.

He said: "I thought I was going to die. It's been the scariest time of my life.

"I feel as though I've been given a second chance and I'm going to grab it with both hands, because you don't know how long you've got."

He added: "I'm going to come back with the best attitude I've ever had. After what I've been through, not knowing if I was going to die, go blind or go deaf, I'm determined to make the most of my life. I want to get in the team and stay there."

But he's been ordered to take it steady and although he hopes to resume training sometime next week, experts from the Meningitis Trust warn it could be longer.

Beeton was struck down by the viral strain of the disease, which is the less serious of the two types of meningitis, eight days ago and was kept in an isolation ward at Watford General Hospital.

Beeton said: "When I came into hospital I couldn't even talk and it felt as though there was a bomb going off in my head.

"When I was on my own cried, but I didn't let my mum and dad see because I knew how worried they were."

As the seriousness of his condition emerged, Wanderers cancelled their tour to Dublin as a precaution and ordered the players to stay at home for the 48-hour incubation period.

They all came through safely although two, Martyn Lee and Nicky Leach, did suffer two unrelated health scares.

Beeton has been overwhelmed by the support he received from fans and players.

He said: "I'd like to thank them all and apologise to those fans that went to Dublin and found the game was off because of me."