

IDRS Infectious Disease Reporting System

Disease Reporting 24 Hours a Day

Columbus Public Health and Franklin County Public Health

REYE SYNDROME

Reye syndrome (RS) is a rare disorder that damages many parts of the body, especially the brain and the liver. Reye syndrome is a two-phase illness because it is almost always associated with a previous viral infection, such as influenza, a common cold, or chickenpox.

Symptoms

- The typical patient is recovering from a viral illness and suddenly develops severe vomiting. This vomiting is persistent, uncontrollable, and very often unresponsive to anti nausea medication.
- Usually, a change in mental status occurs, such as sleepiness, confused thinking, stopping breathing, or seizures.
- The major complication of Reye Syndrome is swelling of the brain. If not treated in a hospital right away, the person may go into a coma, which can lead to death or disabilities.

Transmission

- The cause of Reye Syndrome remains a mystery, but studies have found a link with the use of aspirin during a viral illness. Researchers believe that in some cases it is caused by an abnormal response to aspirin or related products taken during a viral illness.
- Although it can occur at any age, Reye Syndrome most often affects children and teenagers between the ages of 3-12 years old.
- Cases of Reye Syndrome have been decreasing since the link with aspirin use was first reported. Researchers think this is because fewer people are using aspirin to treat ill children.
- Reye Syndrome is not contagious and cannot pass from person-to-person.

Treatment

- People with suspected Reye Syndrome need to be treated in a hospital IMMEDIATELY. The sooner treatment begins the better chance of survival.
- Reye syndrome is diagnosed based on symptoms, blood tests (including tests of liver function), and other tests such as a biopsy of the liver and a spinal tap.
- While there is no cure, the symptoms may be treated. A physician may prescribe drugs to control the swelling in the brain, and intravenous fluids to restore normal blood chemistry.

Prevention

- The safest approach is NEVER to give aspirin or aspirin-containing medicines to children. Aspirin containing products may include words like acetylsalicylate, acetylsalicylic acid, salicylic acid and salicylate on the label. Non-aspirin medicines, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen, should be used instead.
- Some children must take aspirin for certain conditions. For these children, take steps to minimize the risk of acquiring a viral illness (such as getting influenza and chickenpox vaccinations).

All information is general in nature and is not intended to be used as a substitute for appropriate professional advice.



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