Iguanas and salmonellosis

Increased U.S. importation of reptiles, particularly iguanas, poses a significant risk of salmonellosis in children, according to a report in the April issue of The Pediatric Infectious Disease Journal.

Green iguana importation increased from 139,844 in 1989 to 795,741 in 1993, causing researchers to speculate that iguana-associated salmonellosis in U.S. children might be increasing.

Children younger than age 5, those with immunosuppression and elderly individuals are at highest risk. Infants are particularly vulnerable and can contract salmonellosis without direct reptile contact. Care-givers who handle reptiles, their cages or feeding dishes, and then care for children without first washing their hands might spread infection.

As many as 77 percent of lizards might carry Salmonella, the report stated. Salmonella can survive up to 30 months in reptilian stool samples.

Young mothers’ birth outcomes

Young maternal age, independent of other risk factors, increases the chance of adverse pregnancy outcomes, according to a study in the April 27 New England Journal of Medicine.

Between 1970 and 1990, researchers analyzed birth records of 134,088 first-born infants of 52,000 middle-class Utah women, ages 13 to 24. This group was chosen because other social and behavioral risk factors predicting poor birth outcomes were greatly reduced.

Mothers younger than 17 were twice as likely to have low-birth-weight infants or give birth prematurely, than mothers ages 20 to 24. Mothers ages 18 to 19 had less risk for premature or low-birth-weight infants than the youngest mothers, but more than those ages 20 to 24. Those younger than 17 were also most likely to have an infant small for its gestational age.

Researchers speculated two possible causes for poor teen-pregnancy outcomes: an adolescent’s uterus or cervix might not yet have developed an adequate blood supply to support the fetus; or, a teen mother’s developing body might be competing with that of her fetus for nutrients.

Rotavirus vaccine

Two new vaccines safely and significantly reduce severe infant diarrheal illness caused by rotavirus, a study in the April 19 Journal of the American Medical Association reported.

Some 898 healthy infants, ages 4 weeks to 26 weeks, were vaccinated and studied over two years. One-third received a monovalent rotavirus vaccine, one-third a tetravalent vaccine and the rest, a placebo. The only reported adverse reaction was a slight fever after the first dose of tetravalent vaccine. Both vaccines were safe and effective in protecting against serotype 1 rotavirus gastroenteritis, but only the tetravalent vaccine protected against non-serotype 1 rotavirus disease during the second year follow-up.

The monovalent vaccine produced an immune response in 85 percent of recipients, reducing rotavirus disease by 50 percent and the need for medical attention by 67 percent. The tetravalent vaccine produced an immune response in 95 percent of those vaccinated, reducing rotavirus disease by 57 percent and the need for medical visits by 78 percent.

Teen views of nonconsensual sex

Adolescent girls are significantly more knowledgeable than boys about what constitutes rape, sexual harassment and sexual abuse, including issues of “hotel,” according to survey results reported in the March Journal of School Health. Five hundred eighty-eight students from five midwestern metropolitan high schools completed a 25-question survey querying their knowledge and opinions regarding nonconsensual sex, harassment and abuse. Students were asked how much peer pressure they felt to have sex, and how many of their fellow students and close friends they thought had sex. Respondents also were asked if they ever had forced sex.

Survey participants were categorized by gender, white or African-American race, and grade point average (GPA). Males were more likely than females, and whites more likely than African-Americans, to feel pressure to have sex. More females, African-American students and those with lower GPAs perceived that most students in their schools had sex. More African-American students and those with lower GPAs perceived that most or all of their close friends had sex. Those with lower GPAs were most likely to report having had forced sex.

Adolescent girls were significantly more likely than boys to consider: forced sex as rape when the girl was intoxicated; rape the boy’s fault when a girl dressed provocatively on a date; and refusing sexual intercourse even after both partners had started sexual activity, as acceptable. However, one in four students, predominantly female, said they would have sex to keep a relationship going, and one in five students did not know that being forced to have sex with a previous sexual partner was rape.

Closed-head injury hospitalization

Pediatric minor closed-head injuries might not require hospitalization if a child’s computerized tomographic (CT) scans and neurological exams are normal, according to a study in the April issue of Pediatric Emergency Care.

Sixty-two patients seen through an urban university children’s hospital emergency department were hospitalized with mild closed-head injuries. Patients ranged in age from 18 months to 17 years. Most were injured in motor-vehicle accidents or falls. Thirty-seven percent had lost consciousness for one to five minutes after the injury, and 6 percent experienced a seizure.

Initial neurological exams were normal for 79 percent of patients and CT scans showed no acute injuries. Patients were hospitalized for fewer than two days and showed no neurologic deterioration. All but two patients had normal neurological exams on discharge. Long-term outcomes were not reviewed. Researchers concluded that children diagnosed with closed-head injuries who have normal neurological exams and CT scans might be safely observed at home without hospitalization.

Foster children’s health

Children in foster care experience more chronic, multiple medical and mental-health problems than ever before, a study in the April Archives of Pediatric...