Pertussis outbreak

The number of pertussis cases seen at Children’s Memorial Medical Center in Chicago has tripled since 1992, hospital officials say.

Infectious disease specialists at Children’s report 26 confirmed cases this year. Medical center officials say 72 cases were reported. The majority of these cases occurred in June and July.

The Illinois Department of Health reported a 233 percent increase in cases compared to last year, according to Children’s officials.

While pertussis often occurs in older children, cases at Children’s Memorial occurred primarily in young children, who need to be hospitalized because of the substantial morbidity and mortality risk of whooping cough in their age group, Emily Bergmann, Children’s Memorial’s Infection Control Coordinator said.

“We are seeing the tip of the iceberg,” Stanford T. Shulman, M.D., division head of Infectious Disease at Children’s, stated in a press release on July 29.

Dr. Shulman statement refers to the increased incidence of pertussis. In the last weekend of July, Children’s admitted an additional five patients with pertussis symptoms.

“We think the increased incidence is due to lower immunization rates,” Bergmann said. “Forty percent (of this year’s cases) were Hispanic children, close to half of which were under two months. In Chicago, only 23 percent of kids younger than 2 years are immunized.”

Bergmann said that Children’s Memorials recommends that all preschool-aged children be immunized against whooping cough to reduce the risk of infection. This recommendation includes infants as young as ages 6 weeks to 6 weeks who are at high risk of exposure.

Immunizing will reduce the incidence and severity of the disease, Bergmann said.

Bergmann is hoping that publicity of the increased cases at Children’s Memorial will encourage people to get their children immunized.

“We have gone to the media, hoping to express the importance of up-to-date vaccination,” Bergmann said. “We need parents to get their children immunized. We are really pushing this so that this outbreak doesn’t recur.”

Bicycle helmet survey

Most pedestrians who participated in a survey on bicycle safety and helmet education said that they discuss bicycle helmet use with a patient at least once before the patient reaches age 12 years.

The Academy conducted a random national survey of its members to examine current practices in bicycle safety and helmet education among pediatricians.

Of the 871 pediatricians who participated in the survey, 80 percent said they provide bicycle helmet counseling.

The most important determining factor in whether pediatricians counseled their patients was professional experience with injured children, including having had a patient who experienced a serious injury or death because of a bicycle accident. In addition, having children younger than age 18, always wear helmets when riding bicycles, also was associated with bicycle helmet counseling, according to the study.

According to the study’s authors, the findings indicate that the sensitization resulting from personal and professional exposure to the risks of bicycling leads to higher rates of bicycle helmet counseling.

Results of the study can be found in the May 1993 issue of the American Journal of Public Health. The article was based on findings from the “Periodic Survey of Fellows #1.”

Exercise during pregnancy

A study of prenatal patients shows that low-to-moderate levels of exercise at any point in pregnancy does not pose a threat to fetal growth. Results found that more vigorous exercise was associated with increased fetal growth.

In women with prior adverse outcomes or a lack of conditioning, the associations between maternal exercise and fetal growth were equivocal, according to the study.

The study found that fit, low-risk, prenatal patients, exercise was positively associated with fetal growth. With low-to-moderate exercise levels, the adjusted mean birth weights were about 100 grams higher than in non-exercisers. With heavier exercise, larger birth weight increments were seen, close to 300 grams in those who exercised throughout pregnancy at levels of about 2,000 kcal/week in energy expenditure.

The study was published in the May 15, 1993 Journal of Epidemiology.

The results of the study indicate that fit, low-risk pregnant women tolerate longer exercise sessions and perhaps greater exertion than is currently recommended.

Early solid foods

Early introduction of solid food to infants is less harmful than previously reported, according to a recent article published in the June 12 British Medical Journal.

The authors hint that the results of their study demand that a more relaxed approach to early feeding be considered.

Researchers diagnosed the relationships between early introduction of solid food and infant weight, gastrointestinal illness, and allergic illnesses during the first two years of life.

Researchers found that infants given solid foods at an early age (less than 8 weeks or 8 to 12 weeks) were heavier than those introduced to solids later at 4, 8, 13, and 26 weeks of age, but not at 52 and 104 weeks.

At the time of their initial solid feeding, those given solids early were heavier than infants of similar age who had not yet received solids. Incidences of gastrointestinal illness, wheeze, and nappy dermatitis were not related to early introduction of solids, according to the study.

There was a significant but less than two-fold increase in respiratory illness at 14 to 26 weeks of age and persistent cough at 14 to 26 and 27 to 39 weeks of age among the infants given solids early, results found. The incidence of eczema was increased in the infants who received solids at ages 8 weeks to 12 weeks.

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