

Reye's Syndrome Bulletin

Reye's Syndrome is a very serious disease. Children and adults develop Reye's Syndrome as they are getting over a viral illness, such as the flu or chicken pox. Reye's Syndrome usually affects people from infancy through young adulthood; however, no age group is immune. Although Reye's generally occurs when someone is recovering from a viral illness, it can develop three to five days after the onset of the illness. The disease's main targets are the liver and brain. Reye's Syndrome is non-contagious, and too often is misdiagnosed as encephalitis, meningitis, diabetes, poisoning, drug overdose, or sudden infant death.

Early diagnosis is crucial. Following a viral illness, individuals should be watched during the next two to three weeks for the following symptoms:

- • Relentless or continuous vomiting
- • Listlessness (loss of pep and energy)
- • Drowsiness (excessive sleepiness)
- • Personality change (irritability, slurred speech, sensitivity to touch)
- • Disorientation, confusion (unable to identify whereabouts or answer questions)
- • Combativeness (striking out at those trying to help them)
- • Delirium, convulsions, or loss of consciousness



Reye's syndrome should be suspected in anyone who vomits repeatedly. Call your doctor immediately if these symptoms develop. Voice your concern about Reye's Syndrome. If your physician is unavailable, take the person to an Emergency Room promptly. Two liver function tests (SGOT, SGPT) can be done to determine the possibility of Reye's Syndrome. There is a 90% chance of recovery when the syndrome is treated in its earliest stages by physicians and nurses experienced in the treatment of Reye's.

Studies have shown that using aspirin or aspirin-containing medications to treat the symptoms of viral illnesses increases the chance of developing Reye's Syndrome. If you or a member of your family has a viral illness, do not use aspirin or aspirin-containing medications. In fact, you should consult your physician before you take any drugs to treat any viral illness such as the flu or chicken pox, particularly aspirin or anti-nausea.

The National Reye's Syndrome Foundation (NRSF), the U.S. Surgeon General, the Food and Drug

Administration, the Centers for Disease Control, and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend that aspirin and combination products containing aspirin not be taken by anyone under 19 years of age during fever-causing illnesses.

The NRSF is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization with affiliates located in 44 states. The NRSF has pioneered the movement to disseminate knowledge about the disease in an effort to aid in early diagnosis and also provides funds for research into the cause, cure, care, treatment, and prevention of Reye's Syndrome.

Aspirin is a part of the salicylate family of medicines. Another name for aspirin is acetylsalicylate; some drug labels may use the words acetylsalicylate, acetylsalicylic acid, salicylic acid, salicylate, etc., instead of the word aspirin. Currently, there is no conclusive data as to whether other forms of salicylates are associated with the development of Reye's Syndrome. Until further research has answered this question, the NRSF recommends that products containing any of these substances not be taken during episodes of viral infections.

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