



Children's Health

Infectious Childhood Diseases

WHAT THEY ARE AND HOW YOUR CHILD CAN AVOID THEM

CHICKEN POX

This disease is characterized by a pimplelike rash that blisters and becomes itchy. It's often preceded by a moderate fever, mild headache and lethargy. The blisters will dry into scabs. Once all the blisters have scabbed over and no lesions appear, the child is no longer contagious. The incubation period, from the time of exposure until breakout, is about two to three weeks. Antihistamines can be prescribed to ease the itching and antibiotics may be needed if the scratching causes a bacterial infection. Chicken pox is most dangerous to children with leukemia or other immune deficiency diseases. A vaccine and other preventative treatments should be discussed with your child's doctor.

DIPHTHERIA

Early symptoms resemble the flu or other upper respiratory illnesses. Advanced symptoms include: rapid heartbeat, swollen or sore throat, difficulty breathing or swallowing, swollen lymph nodes and profuse nasal discharge. Before a diphtheria vaccine was developed in the 1930s, this disease killed thousands. This vaccine is usually administered together with the pertussis and tetanus vaccines beginning at 2 months of age.

MEASLES

Early symptoms include coldlike symptoms: a mild fever, nasal congestion, a mild cough and red eyes. Within a few days, spots looking like tiny grains of white sand appear inside the mouth. A day or so later, a red rash on the face and a high fever (as high as 105°F) appear. Measles itself is not dangerous unless complications, such as pneumonia, severe ear infection or encephalitis, set in. Avoid measles by having your child vaccinated.

MUMPS

Pain and swelling of the glands in the upper neck and jaw are characteristic of the infectious mumps virus. The mumps virus attacks salivary glands and is fought off by the body with a high fever. Bed rest, a diet of bland foods, acetaminophen to reduce the fever and warm or cold compresses on the swollen glands are the common treatment. In children, this disease is generally not serious. The only effective way to avoid mumps is to have your child vaccinated.

RUBELLA (GERMAN MEASLES)

This disease is characterized by fatigue, headache and fever, followed by a rash a day or two later. Complications of rubella are rare in children. Pregnant women who are exposed to rubella are at high risk because the infection may cause miscarriage, stillbirth or

birth defects that include blindness, deafness and heart defects. There is no specific treatment for rubella. If marked drowsiness, sensitivity to bright light and headache occur, seek treatment immediately, as potentially fatal encephalitis is a complication of rubella. Avoid rubella by having your child vaccinated.

POLIO

This disease is a viral illness that attacks the nerves that control the muscles of the body. Except in Western countries, where children are routinely vaccinated against polio, it's spread by personal contact or by eating or drinking contaminated foods or liquids. Early symptoms include: headache, sore throat and fever. Pain in the neck and back muscles follows. A loss of mobility and, in some cases, paralysis is the end result of the disease.

WHOOPIING COUGH (PERTUSSIS)

This disease is characterized by repeated coughing without being able to take a breath. When the child is able to take a breath, there is a whooping sound. Coughing is accompanied by fever, vomiting and weight loss. A cool-mist humidifier can help loosen bronchial secretions and soothe the cough. Don't give cough medicine unless it's prescribed by your child's doctor. Whooping cough is most dangerous to infants. Immunizations are routinely administered to prevent the disease.

TUBERCULOSIS (TB)

This is an infectious disease that was once one of the leading causes of death worldwide. Improved sanitation and living conditions and the development of antibiotics have influenced the decline in TB cases and deaths. Symptoms include: chronic cough, chest pain (especially when taking a deep breath) and shortness of breath. A simple skin test can detect the disease. An active infection can be treated with antibiotics over a 12- to 18-month period. Proper nutrition and adequate rest are also instrumental in treating TB.

MONONUCLEOSIS

This disease is caused by the Epstein-Barr virus, a member of the herpes family. The disease occurs most often in children and young adults. Early symptoms are similar to flu symptoms: headache, sore throat, general feeling of illness and weakness. These symptoms are followed by painful, swollen glands in the neck, armpits and groin. Jaundice or a rash similar to that of German measles may also develop. Getting lots of bed rest, drinking plenty of fluids and taking acetaminophen for symptom relief is the recommended treatment for this virus.