

Reye's Syndrome

How much do you know about it?

Reye's Syndrome usually appears after a flu-like illness, upper respiratory infection, chickenpox, or other viral infection. Reye's Syndrome generally occurs when someone is recovering from a viral illness, and can develop 3 to 5 days after the onset of the illness. Reye's Syndrome normally affects people from infancy through young adulthood; however no age group is immune.

It's main targets are the liver and brain; it is not contagious; and it may be misdiagnosed as encephalitis, meningitis, diabetes, poisoning, drug overdose, or sudden infant death.

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. Other names for aspirin include acetylsalicylate, acetylsalicylate, acetylsalicylic acid, salicylic acid, salicylate, etc.

The National Reye's Syndrome Foundation, the U.S. Surgeon General, the Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend that aspirin and combination products containing aspirin not be taken by anyone under 19 years of age during fever-causing illnesses.

If you or a member of your family has a viral illness, do not use aspirin or aspirin-containing medications. Do not use anti nausea medicines either as they may mask a key symptom of Reye's Syndrome, namely the nausea & vomiting. Early diagnosis is crucial.

An individual should be watched for 2 to 3 weeks following a viral illness for the following symptoms, usually occurring in this order:

- *Relentless or continuous vomiting
- *Listlessness
- *Drowsiness
- *Disorientation or confusion
- *Combativeness
- *Delirium, convulsions or loss of consciousness

Reye's Syndrome should be suspected in anyone who vomits repeatedly. Phone your doctor immediately and voice your concerns of Reye's Syndrome. Take the person to the Emergency Room promptly if your physician is not available. Two liver function tests (SGOT, SGPT) can be done to determine the possibility of Reye's Syndrome. A 90% chance of recovery is reported when the syndrome is treated by physicians and nurses in its earliest stages.

The above information has been gleaned from the National Reye's Syndrome Foundation, Inc., 2007