

Health Report

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INFANT ILLNESS CAUSED BY COMMON ANTIBIOTIC

A common antibiotic used to treat whooping cough has been linked to a severe stomach disorder in infants, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

The CDC warns physicians that Erythromycin may cause pyloric stenosis, a condition where a muscle enlarges in the stomach and blocks food from passing to the small intestine. It causes projectile vomiting and requires surgery to correct the problem.

The warning came after a Tennessee community hospital reported seven cases of pyloric stenosis in infants after being given Erythromycin. All seven infants were less than three weeks old.

The CDC warns physicians “should carefully evaluate the risks and benefits of Erythromycin in newborns less than a month old before prescribing the medication.”

Erythromycin, the most often prescribed antibiotic, is also given to infants to treat chlamydia infections passed from child to mother and is found in an eye ointment routinely given to newborns to prevent blinding from possible gonorrheal infections.

Dr. Warren Rosenfeld, chairman of pediatrics at Winthrop University Hospital in Mineola, NY, said the association between this antibiotic and this side effect had not been made before, but it will be studied.

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ANTIBIOTICS GIVEN TO PREVENT PREMATURE BIRTHS COULD BE USELESS

Pregnant women have been given antibiotics to prevent premature births, but according to a recent study, the treatment is not only useless, but could also be linked to the rise of antibiotic-resistant bacteria throughout the world.

The study, published by the *New England Journal of Medicine*, reported antibiotics do not benefit the mother or infant in any way – having no effect on birth weight or reducing complications.

Antibiotics were found to cause negative side effects in 22% of participants, who experienced stomach problems, such as vomiting. Only 9% who were not given the drug had similar side effects.

The majority of women who are given antibiotics during pregnancy have bacterial vaginosis, a chronic vaginal inflammation caused by an overgrowth of bacteria, which can cause premature births.

The world wide health community warns that the unnecessary use of antibiotics drugs has introduced “super bacteria;” antibiotic resistant bacteria, and according to the World Health Organization, the outbreak of epidemics, such as AIDS, may have also been caused by the misuse and abuse of antibiotic drug use.

*SOURCE: Health Watch online; www.wcanews.com/achieves, May 2000;
The New England Journal of Medicine, 2000; 342:534-540.*

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FDA INVESTIGATION CALLED INADEQUATE BY CONGRESSIONAL INVESTIGATORS

The Food and Drug Administration's recent investigation into deaths linked to a tainted antibiotic, supplied by a foreign drug manufacturer, was called inadequate and incomplete by Congressional investigators.

FDA Drug Chief, Janet Woodcock said the FDA assessed the reported deaths and could not link them with the drug in question, the antibiotic gentamicin sulfate.

Rep. Tom Bliley said they had demanded an analysis of all information in the FDA files pertaining to the deaths and any problems that could be linked to the drug. FDA files showed 17 deaths might have been caused by gentamicin.

Bliley's investigators said the FDA did not comply with the order – the agency did not supply all available details on the cases, did not conduct full investigations, failed to produce reports and gave conflicting reports to various news organizations.

Woodcock admitted that the FDA assessment was based solely on written reports of the cases without any further investigation.

The FDA have taken action with an "import alert" on bulk gentamicin by Long March Pharmaceuticals in China and have explored health problems linked to Long March ingredients. Severe toxic reactions were found in some people who had been given the drug. Long March said it complied with FDA regulations and had taken corrective actions.

SOURCE: USA Today, Thursday, May 11, 2000, Section 2A.