

CONDITON: Reyes Syndrome

What is it: Reye's (Ryes) syndrome is a rare but serious condition that causes confusion, swelling in the brain, and liver damage. Reye's syndrome most often affects children and teenagers recovering from a viral infection, most commonly the flu or chickenpox.

Who is at risk: The following factors typically, when they occur together, may increase your child's risk of developing Reye's syndrome: Using aspirin to treat a viral infection, such as flu, chickenpox or an upper respiratory infection and having an underlying fatty acid oxidation disorder.

Cause: The exact cause of Reye's syndrome is unknown, although several factors may play a role in its development. Reye's syndrome seems to be triggered by using aspirin to treat a viral illness or infection (particularly flu (influenza) and chickenpox) in children and teenagers who have an underlying fatty acid oxidation disorder. Fatty acid oxidation disorders are a group of inherited metabolic disorders in which the body is unable to break down fatty acids because an enzyme is missing or not working properly. A screening test is needed to determine if your child has a fatty acid oxidation disorder. In some cases, Reye's syndrome may be an underlying metabolic condition that's unmasked by a viral illness. Exposure to certain toxins such as insecticides, herbicides and paint thinners may also contribute to Reye's syndrome.

Symptoms: Blood sugar level typically drops while the levels of ammonia and acidity in his or her blood rise. At the same time, the liver may swell and develop fatty deposits. Swelling may also occur in the brain, which can cause seizures, convulsions or loss of consciousness. The signs and symptoms of Reye's syndrome typically appear about three to five days after the onset of a viral infection, such as the flu (influenza) or chickenpox, or an upper respiratory infection, such as a cold. For children younger than age 2, the first signs of Reye's syndrome may include diarrhea and rapid breathing while for older children or teenagers signs may be vomiting, sleepiness, or lethargy. As the condition progresses worsening symptoms can occur, such as irritable, aggressive, irrational behavior, confusion, disorientation or hallucinations, weakness or paralysis in the arms and legs, seizures, excessive lethargy, and decreased level of consciousness.

Diagnosis: Blood/urine test, spinal tap, CT/MRI, skin biopsy, liver biopsy

Complications: Most children survive some with permanent brain damage, syndrome can be fatal.

Treatment: IV fluids, diuretics, and sometimes medications to prevent bleeding.

Did you know? Flu and Chicken Pox are the two most common viral illnesses related to Reyes Syndrome onset.

Prevention: AVOID ASPIRIN and make sure your children are up to date with flu/varicella vaccines.