

Health Briefs

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News Writer

So many chickenpox, so little time

TORONTO -- A Toronto pediatrician says that school exclusion for children with chickenpox should be reconsidered. This view contradicts the tradition of isolating the child until scabbing, to prevent spreading the disease to other children.

In a recent interview with AAP News, Ronald Gold, M.D., FAAP, head of Infectious Diseases at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto, said isolation is unjustifiable because 95 percent of children will eventually get chickenpox by the time they are young adults. In addition, more than \$400 million in parental wages are lost because parents stay home to take care of their children, he said.

If chickenpox-infected children aren't feeling sick, they should go to school and expose other children, Dr. Gold said. He asserts that it's better to contract chickenpox in early childhood, when the symptoms are relatively mild and there is little danger of complications. Adults who contract chickenpox suffer more serious complications.

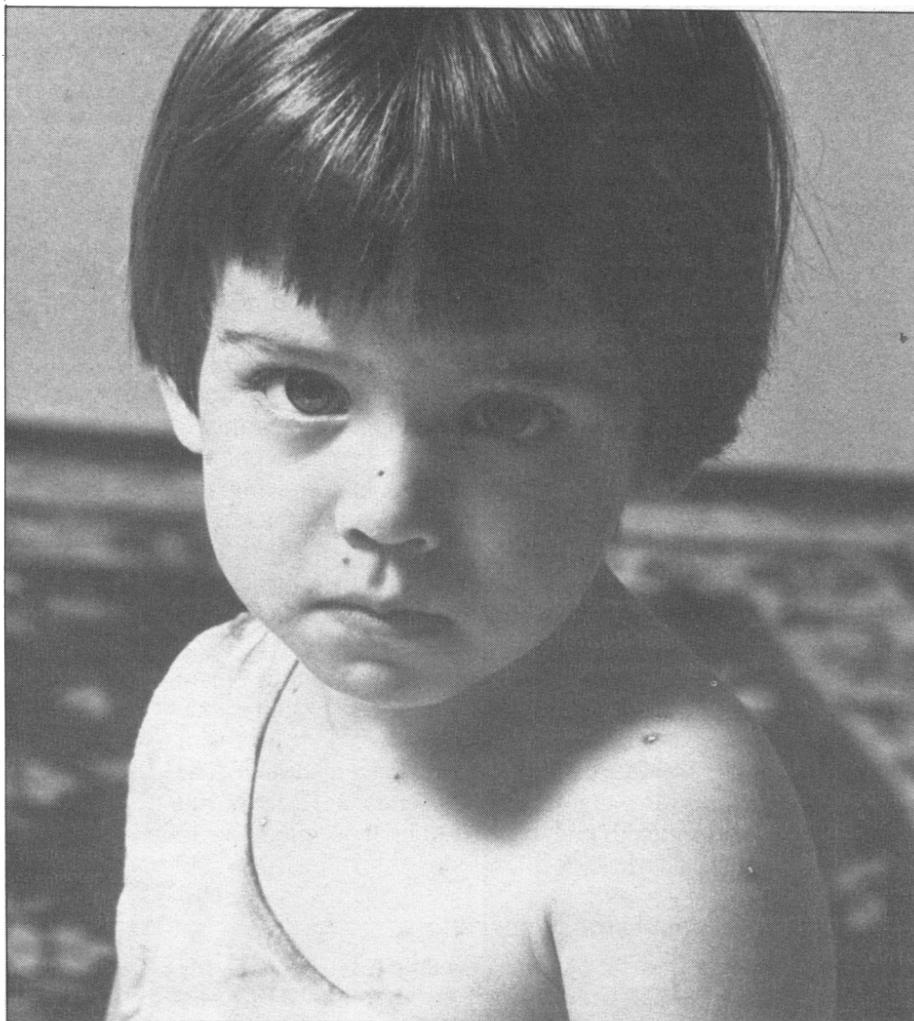
Isolating children with chickenpox doesn't prevent others from contracting the disease, because the highest period of contagiousness is a few days before the rash outbreak, Dr. Gold said.

"Exclusion and quarantine is an old approach to stop the spread of common diseases," he said. "It was enforced in the 1920s and 1930s in trying to control diphtheria. But chickenpox is different. Exclusion doesn't work because the children are contagious before the rash even appears."

Keeping children home from school "puts a lot of burden on the parents," he said. "For children who are obviously sick and not feeling well, this doesn't apply. But for those feeling all right there is no reason to keep them at home. It is counterproductive."

FDA approves rapid AIDS test

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The U.S. Food and Drug Administration recently approved a 10-minute diagnostic test kit which can be used by health care professionals to detect the presence of Human Immunodeficiency Virus



Jerry Daliege

One expert says isolating children with chickenpox is counterproductive. Jaclyn Debb, 3 years, of Glencoe, Ill., is recuperating from the disease.

Type-1 (HIV-1), which causes AIDS.

FDA officials said that the new HIV-1 diagnostic kit will quickly and reliably detect antibodies to HIV-1. The test can be used in physicians' offices, clinics, emergency rooms, small hospitals, laboratories or other health care settings where traditional HIV diagnostic test kits are impractical or unavailable.

Murex Corporation of Toronto, the developer of the test, will market the newly licensed diagnostic test kit under the trade name Murex SUDS HIV-1 Test.

According to the FDA, the Murex kit has a sensitivity and a specificity comparable to other currently approved HIV-1 test kits used by clinical laboratories. In clinical trials involving 8,714 specimens at 11 test sites, it had a sensitivity of 99.9 percent and a specificity of 99.6 percent.

The procedure involving the Murex test includes mixing a small amount of a patient's serum or plasma with

an antibody reagent to which only HIV-1 antibodies will attach. When a special solution is added to the serum or plasma, plus a reagent mixture, the window at the bottom of the test cartridge indicates the result. The enzyme turns blue if the results indicate that antibodies to HIV-1 are present.

As with other screening tests, positive results must be confirmed by additional testing with other licensed test kits such as the Western Blot or immunofluorescence assay, FDA officials said.

Mother to infant HIV transmission

BETHESDA, MD. -- Investigators at the National Institutes of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) found that HIV-infected infants who contract the HIV virus from their mothers are infected with only a limited number of viral strains, indicating that selective transmission of a single variant of virus may be occurring in mother-to-child transmission.

This finding contradicts when HIV is cultured from the blood of infected adults and many different strains of the virus are often observed within the blood of a single person.

Approximately 6,000 HIV-infected women give birth each year in the United States, and up to 30 percent of their infants are infected during pregnancy or delivery, according to NICHD officials.

To determine whether selective transmission occurs, NICHD investigators extracted DNA from blood samples from three HIV-infected mothers and their HIV-infected infants. They found that the babies, in contrast to their mothers, had only a few viral variants present and that the

predominant strain of virus in that infants was a variant that was rare in the mothers.

In addition, the viral strains in all three infants were found to lack, at the same location, a specific carbohydrate-binding site that may be critical for both recognition by the immune system and for invasiveness of the virus; without this site, the virus could escape immune response in the mother and possibly be more likely to infect the fetus.

These findings could have important implications for understanding the mechanism of mother-to-infant HIV transmission and for the development of a vaccine to block such a transmission, according to NICHD.

Fewer white children placed for adoption

WASHINGTON -- Unmarried white women are far less likely than they were in the early 1970s to place their children for adoption, according to a study in the January-February Family Planning Perspectives.

Compared with two decades ago, children born to unwed, white mothers in the United States during the mid-1980s were six times less likely to be placed for adoption, according to researchers, who analyzed data from the 1982 and 1988 National Survey of Family Growth. Investigators found that before 1973, 19

percent of children born to never-married white women were placed for adoption, compared with 8 percent between 1973 and 1981, and 3 percent between 1982 and 1988.

This particular decline has been limited to white women, according to the article. Among never-married black women, fewer than 2 percent of children were placed for adoption before 1973, and this number has remained low. Relinquishment among Hispanic women may be virtually nonexistent, according to the authors.

The decrease may be linked to the increasing acceptability of nonmarital childbearing, as well as to the legalization of abortion in 1973, the article states.

Investigators reported that a high level of maternal education as well as factors associated with the opportunity costs of becoming a parent are associated with a higher probability of placing a child for adoption. The older a woman is, the greater the likelihood that she will place her child up for adoption, the authors state.

Pharmacies provide child health information

CAMBRIDGE, MASS. -- Consumers will find better information about prescriptions and health information at many of their pharmacies thanks to the Pharmacy Information Center (PIC), a computer system that allows customers free access to onscreen and printed information on prescriptions and health care subjects.

PIC's database provides consumers with thousands of updated leaflets on medicines and health topics.

The Academy and Medical Strategies, Inc., have created a database on child health information as part of

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AAP News
Published Monthly



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