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Subject: chicken pox

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Effects on the Brain and Central Nervous System.

- **Inflammation in the Brain.** Encephalitis and meningitis, infections or inflammation in the central nervous systems, have occurred in a few varicella patients, both children and adults. This condition can be very dangerous, causing coma and even death. Fortunately, it is extremely rare. Symptoms vary. The patient may become over-agitated or may exhibit loss of coordination and poor balance.
- **Stroke.** Although stroke in children is extremely rare, a condition called cerebral vasculitis, in which blood vessels in the brain become inflamed, has been associated with varicella-zoster. Varicella may be a factor in some cases of stroke in young adults.

Effects During Pregnancy. The risk for chickenpox in a pregnant woman is very low (1 - 7 cases in 10,000). However, chickenpox places the woman at risk for life-threatening pneumonia. Infection in the pregnant woman in the first trimester also poses a 1 - 2% chance for infecting the developing fetus, which is an extremely serious condition. (Herpes zoster is even rarer in pregnant women, and there is almost no risk for the unborn child in such cases.)

Disseminated Varicella. Disseminated varicella, which develops when the virus spreads to organs in the body, is extremely serious and is a major problem for patients with compromised immune systems. An immune system may become compromised as a result of diseases such as AIDS, inherited conditions, or certain drugs. For example, disseminated varicella occurs in up to 35% of children with chickenpox who are undergoing cancer chemotherapy. In such cases, mortality rates are between 7 - 30%.

Reye Syndrome. Reye syndrome, a disorder that causes sudden and dangerous liver and brain damage, is a side effect of aspirin therapy in children who have chickenpox or influenza. The disease can lead to coma and is life threatening. Symptoms include rash, vomiting, and confusion beginning about a week after the onset of the disease. Because of the strong warnings against children taking aspirin, this condition is, fortunately, very rare. Children should never be given aspirin when they have a viral infection or fever. Acetaminophen (Tylenol) is the preferred drug for fever or pain in patients younger than age 18 years.

Other Rare Complications of Chickenpox. Other extremely rare complications of varicella include problems in blood clotting and inflammation of the nerves in the hands and feet. Inflammation can also occur in other are

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