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Virus with a stomach for winter

Sanchita Sharma
New Delhi, January 7

WINTER HAS thrown up an unhealthy surprise this year. Swati Dharmarajan was foxed when her 6-year-old son Aditya got a sudden, acute attack of vomiting. "We are very careful about what he eats and drinks and I could not understand how he got such an acute stomach infection," says his worried mom. The culprit, she found, was a virus that can strike you even in the most sterilised of atmospheres.

"The current bout of gastric distress are caused by a virus and is referred to as the winter vomiting disease," says Dr Anupam Sibal, senior paediatrician at Apollo Hospital. "It typically starts with severe vomiting that can last for 24-48 hours." The virus strikes the young and the old alike, and general physicians are getting many complaints of fever and vomiting that lasts for two-three days.

While the virus causing the illness in India has not been identified, winter vom-



WINTER WOES: Dr Anupam Sibal with a young patient

iting disease in the West is caused by Noroviruses, a group of viruses formerly known as Norwalk-like viruses or Small Round Structured Viruses, reports the British medical journal, *BMC Public Health*.

"The virus spreads in winter because the cold brings down people's natural immunity and makes them more susceptible to infection," says Dr Subhash Arya,

senior consultant paediatrician, Ganga Ram Hospital, who has been getting patients with these symptoms. "Since the virus is transmitted through coughing, sneezing, contaminated faecal matter and infected vomit, maintaining basic hygiene such as washing hands prevents infection," he adds. Dr Sibal adds a word of caution: "The virus can spread through the air from vomit

Stomach this

Vomiting, diarrhoea and fever last for two to three days. The symptoms are:

- ▶ Nausea
- ▶ Sudden onset of vomiting
- ▶ Diarrhoea
- ▶ Abdominal cramps/pain
- ▶ Headache
- ▶ Fever
- ▶ Tiredness

and can infect others even when there is no proximity with an infected person."

Since the infection is caused by a virus, the illness runs its course. "The treatment given has to be supportive as antibiotics do not work," says Dr Sibal. Drinking lots of water is important. A person remains infectious for two days after the symptoms go away, so care should be taken that he uses separate towels etc.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2004

NO ONE COVERS DILLI LIKE WE DO. ALL THE NEWS IN DETAIL, DEPTH

Asthma on rise among children One-Fourth Of Pre-School Age Kids Are Wheezers: Doctors

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Delhi's pollution levels may have reportedly gone down, but cases of asthma — especially among children — continue to be on the rise.

"Earlier, about 5-10% of the children would show its symptoms. Now the number has risen to around 15-20%. In fact, one-fourth of the children in the pre-school age are recurrent wheezers," said Dr Sanjiv Bagai, senior consultant paediatrician at Batra Hospital. Post-Diwali and up to February, it can be a particularly bad time for these children. "In the past month, about 40-50% of cases in the OPD have been re-

lated to respiratory disorders," added Dr Bagai.

The important thing, point out doctors, is to recognise the trigger that sets off an asthma attack in your child. "If a child is having repeated attacks of wheezing, one needs to find out the trigger in the environment. It could be heavy curtains or pets or maybe some plants,"

said Dr Anupam Sibal, director, medical services at Indraprastha Apollo Hospital.

While pollution levels may have fallen over the past few years thanks to the switchover to CNG, doctors say that has had no bearing on asthma among children. "It is still much above the critical level. Also, pollution has only

HEALTH ALARM

- Doctors advise parents to identify factors that trigger allergy
- This despite the fact that pollution levels have gone down in the city

now gone down while some of these children may have had their first attack about three to four years back when the levels were still high," said Dr Anoop Misra of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences. "Smoking certainly hasn't decreased and it affects passive smokers as well," added Dr Sibal.

While some children do grow out of the problem, in others, it is important to let them lead as normal a life as possible. "Quality of life should not be compromised.

Having asthma shouldn't mean that the child is not able to participate in sports. If he has to be put on inhalers for that, the step must be taken," said Dr Sibal.

In fact, the number of children dependent on inhalers has also gone up significantly in the past few years. "Their advantage lies in the fact that their effect is instantaneous and the required dose is much less," said Dr Bagai.

Apart from taking medicines, children should avoid aerated drinks, tinned food items like baked beans and ketchup, fish and sea food, potato chips, ice cream, chewing gum and Chinese food which has ajinomoto. Strong perfumes, tattoos and certain medications like aspirin can also trigger attacks.



THE TIMES

Chicken pox vaccine not foolproof

By Sujata Dutta Sachdeva
Times News Network

New Delhi: And you had thought, thank god, finally a vaccine for chicken pox?

For over five years, doctors in India have been recommending chicken pox vaccination for children, even though it does not figure in the list of mandatory vaccinations, and no comparative study has ever been conducted here.

Now they may have to do a rethink, after new studies in the US have raised doubts about its effectiveness. According to the study, published last week in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, found the effectiveness of the vaccine is found to fade substantially a year after it is administered.



Jabbing Question

- Immunity found to fade a year later
- Vaccine may just push the disease into adulthood when it could be more severe
- Now, the question: should it be given?

those who got chicken pox after receiving the shots had only mild symptoms. What's the solution then? Sibal suggests administering a second dose, "Even now, children beyond 15 years are recommended two doses." The catch: it's expensive. "The way out could be to combine it with MMR or measles, mumps and rubella vaccine, say doctors, which need second, or booster doses."

Senior paediatrician Rahul Nagpal says no vaccine is 100 per cent effective, and that out of every 100 children immunised, three to four get the disease afterwards. "It's still a comparatively new drug and not in the list of mandatory immunisation. Until further studies confirm the ill effects, there is no need to panic."

Some pertinent questions. It is a matter of concern," says Dr Anupal Sibal, senior child specialist, Indraprastha Apollo Hospital. "The findings do raise some pertinent questions. It is a matter of concern," says Dr Anupal Sibal, senior child specialist, Indraprastha Apollo Hospital. "The study, carried out over several years by researchers at Yale Medical School, further found that in children above 15 months, protection was 99 per cent in the first year, and only 73 per cent in those below 15 months. However, adults whose childhood immunity has worn off it increases their vulnerability to the disease, say experts. "It's still a comparatively new drug and not in the list of mandatory immunisation. Until further studies confirm the ill effects, there is no need to panic."

SUNDAY TIMES OF INDIA New Delhi, February 29, 2004

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Do you really need flu shots?

"Influenza is just one of the 200 viral origin are wrongly termed 'flu' viruses that cause flu-like symptoms of a fever, cough and cold," he says. "The influenza vaccine is recommended only for those with suppressed immunity and lung diseases such as very severe asthma and bronchiectasias," says Dr Anupam Sibal, senior consultant paediatrician at Apollo Hospital.

"Older people with chronic bronchitis and emphysema also benefit from the vaccine as the influenza virus is more virulent than other viruses that cause flu-like symptoms," adds Dr Singh.

Globally, the vaccine is recommended for small children, the elderly, and people with underlying health conditions. Healthy people would be better off taking their chances against the many viruses that thrive around them.

A SHORTAGE of the influenza vaccine may have alarmed the US but few doctors in India recommend it for the general public.

The reason — while the influenza shot protects you against the dominant flu strain, it offers no protection from other virus strains that give you flu-like symptoms of fever and congestion.

"The general perception is that getting a flu vaccine would protect you from all types of fever and colds, but that doesn't happen. The vaccine works against the influenza virus and offers no protection against parainfluenza and other viruses that cause fever," says Dr Meherban Singh, former head of paediatrics, AIIMS.

The misunderstanding happens because all symptoms of fever of vi-



Sick report

- Think twice before spending RS 550 on flu vaccine
 - It only protects you from influenza, one of the 200 viruses that cause flu-like symptoms
- You have flu if you have** Fever above 101 degrees that lasts about four days, shaking, severe chills, muscle aches, fatigue, dry cough

25th Oct 2004

HINDUSTAN TIMES

SUNDAY

BRUNO
Upwardly Mobile

HT CITY
One out of 10 students
in Delhi has had sex
with a classmate

The Big Story page 8
From
murder to
pleaze

New Delhi, December 12, 2004, Metro  www.hindustantimes.com Rs 4.50

Click health with care

Samrat Choudhury
New Delhi, December 11

BRITNEY SPEARS has reportedly grown up into a would-be mother, and is browsing the Internet for pregnancy-related information. More humble souls here have been surfing the Web for information everything medical for a while now. "I surf for information on personal health matters — things you don't feel like going to a doctor for," says Delhi-based engineer Neelaj De. He finds diet and sexual health related information on the Web.

As an increasing number of people log on for medical advice, the kind of places they look for health information is becoming important. But search engines don't discriminate between accurate and inaccurate information, and the Web is full of both.

"Getting the right information is another. What to do with the information is an even more important issue", says Dr Anupam Sibal, senior paediatrician in Apollo Hospital, Delhi.

E-Health checklist

■ **How to find a reliable medical info website:**
"See who's running the site", says Internet Service Provider Deepak Maheshwari. If it's run by a reputed medical college or hospital, you can trust it. Examples: Apollo, Escorts

■ **Is it recognised by Health on the Net? Go to h.on.ch and run a search for India.** Note whether the sites listed in results are individual, educational, non-profit or commercial. Usually, it's a good idea to go to the non-profit first and individual site last

Dr Sibal recommends that people search the Web, but also consult their physicians. "Otherwise you end up getting very confused," he says.

Hepatitis B inoculation a must, says Kalam

THE INCLUSION of hepatitis B vaccine in the government's child immunisation programme can help combat this disease, President Abdul Kalam said at a conference organised by Asia Pacific Association for the Study of Liver (APASL) on Saturday.

Kalam also exhorted scientists to find a cure to Hepatitis C in three years. He expressed the need for bringing down the cost of liver transplantation and amending the Indian Organ Transplant Act (1994) so that it would benefit the poor.

Association president Dr S.K. Sarin said while most people were aware about major killer diseases like AIDS and TB, but few realise the enormity of liver ailments.

HTC

There's also email. Eminent sexologist Dr Prakash Kohari calls himself "computer illiterate", but he does write back saying we can have a telephonic consultation. "Often, his patients tell him they have searched the Net extensively before coming to him, says Kohari. They get to him with a lot of misconceptions, he says. For those who like to surf the web for health queries, Sibal suggests sites run by support and self-help groups. Aarogya.com has listings of support groups for cancer, AIDS, epilepsy, schizophrenia and several other diseases. Another Indian site, medivision.com, has a doctor finder service in addition to information. At a global level, initiatives are on to bring order into the chaotic Network. The Health on the Net Foundation (www.hon.ch) has an initiative for accreditation of medical websites. It also offers a free toolbar that provides automatic verification of the accreditation status of medical websites.