

Chicken Pox

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In a previous article I discussed Meningococcal Meningitis. It is interesting to contrast that illness with chicken pox. Meningococcal meningitis is an uncommon illness though is very serious. On the other hand, chicken pox is a common illness but very mild. In my generation, we all went through it and we all (well most of us) turned out OK!!!

Chicken pox is a very mild illness: older text books describes it as so with serious complications occurring only very rarely, mainly in immunocompromised children or in those that are already sick with something else. (Current Pediatric Diagnosis and Treatment Lange Medical Publications 1976, Nelson Textbook of Pediatrics, W B Saunders Company 10th Edition 1975, Handbook of Pediatrics, Lange Medical Publications 1975).

Today, the authorities are trying to convince us that chicken pox is a serious illness and we should vaccinate against it. It seems that once a vaccine is developed the disease evolves into a serious illness and the use of the vaccine is encouraged. I suppose it is a plot so that the drug company can recover their development costs.

How serious is chicken pox anyway?

According to the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly report (MMRW) 1998;May 15;47(18):365-8, 43 children died of chicken pox, on average per year between 1990-1994 in the USA. This is in a population of 250 million. Figures from Britain show a death rate from chicken pox, on average 25 per year. Adults accounted for 81% of these deaths (BMJ 2001;323:1091-3) To look at these figures in perspective, in Britain 10 die every day from motor vehicle accidents. Of course, any childhood death is a great tragedy and by saying this I am not diminishing the effects of any child's death on their families. I am merely looking at the overall perspective.

Do children die of chicken pox?

Very rarely. Most children die from the complications of chicken pox.....we can possibly say that many die due to their treatment. In the MMRW paper referred to above, 3 cases of childhood death from chicken pox are detailed. The common thing is that they had high temperatures and were admitted to hospital where multiple drugs were given.

Did the children die of chicken pox or the treatment they were given? These children were given antibiotics, analgesics, antipyretics, steroids, antiviral medicines and as their conditions grew worse, even more drugs were given and they deteriorated even more.

For a start, temperature is very important. The immune system, the white cells work more efficiently at a higher temperature. The body produces the temperature, not the illness. The body produces the temperature to fight the illness...IT SHOULD NOT BE SUPPRESSED. Giving temperature suppressing medicines can make the illness worse. Do not give antipyretics too freely. Giving steroids suppresses the immune system, how in heaven's name can a child fight an illness if its immune system is suppressed.

These children's system needed to be supported with fluids, with vitamin C in large doses, Homeopathic remedies, such as Rhus Tox, Tissue salts, herbs with immune strengthening properties such as Echinacia: all these are viable treatment methods.

The children who died were described as healthy children before becoming ill. We can only speculate on the reality of how healthy they really were.

What is the nutritional status of children generally in the USA? Generally pretty poor.

Parents are being encouraged to give their children a vaccine to prevent this mild disease. What is the sense? Sure, some children get it worse than others and complications are very rare.

What is the point of giving a vaccine to children to prevent a mild illness, especially when the length of protection is unknown? If we look at the other vaccines, the length of action is limited.

Why should the chicken pox vaccine be any different? Here we have the situation where children are given a vaccine to prevent a mild illness in childhood and the effectiveness wears off by adulthood, when they are vulnerable and adults are effected more severely than children. Adults are ten times more likely than under 14 year old children to need hospitalisation and twenty times more likely to die than children. Remember the reference above from the BMJ, 81% of those that died from chicken pox were adults. Catching the "real thing", however, will give permanent immunity. We should let children catch chicken pox for their future health.

I will refer back to Pasteur and the now famous declaration he supposedly uttered on his deathbed. The seed or the soil? The seed, the chicken pox virus, probably has not changed greatly but the soil has. There are more sick children about, there are more children with poor immunity about and the overall nutrition of children generally is poor. We can speculate why this is so. There is the pollution, the poor quality of the food, even the immune suppressive action of all the vaccines they are given. When sick, children are given drugs which suppress the immune system even further. What should happen is that their immune system should be supported and strengthened.

How can you protect your children?

One of the most important protective measures is to breast feed your baby. Maternal antibodies from breast milk protect the children. Here again we make an assumption that the mother has antibodies to give her child. If the mother has had chicken pox in the past then she will have antibodies. Antibodies from the vaccine do not have the same effect. This is the same with measles. Babies are protected by maternal antibodies but only if the antibodies were naturally acquired. Babies born to mothers who have vaccine induced antibodies are not protected. A similar situation can occur with chicken pox. To go on further with the assumption that most adults have some immunity to chicken pox, a study in Pediatric Infectious Disease Journal 2001;20:1087-88 suggested that if a child doesn't get chicken pox by age ten, then the child is probably immune.

In a paper in JAMA 2002;287(17):2211, scientists declared that immunising children against chicken pox could increase the risk that adults would develop shingles. They said that adults being close to children are exposed to the virus which acts as a booster to their own immunity so their dormant chicken pox virus would not reactivate. If all the children were immunised, the adults would not have this protection.

The vaccine

The Chicken pox vaccine was introduced to the USA approximately in 1995 and uptake has been slow, mainly due to parental resistance (They are beginning to learn!) but now, at least in some parts of the USA, the vaccine is being mandated and the numbers are rising.

In Australia, vaccination is not compulsory. I have no figures but are probably quite low.

In Australia, the vaccine is called Varilrix and is recommended to be given between the age of 12-18 months. Children over the age of 12 years are suggested to have 2 doses 6-10 weeks apart. Contraindications: *Acute febrile illness, *pregnancy, *immuno-compromised individuals, e.g. AIDS sufferers, those with cancer on chemotherapy. (This is quite interesting as the original reason the vaccine was made was to "protect" immuno-compromised individuals), *allergy to gelatine or neomycin.

Side effects

Like any other vaccine there are side effects, though as we are always told they are "rare", though this is probably a reflection on the grossly under-reporting of vaccine side effects. The most common side effects are fever and soreness at the site of injection. Others include a chicken pox like rash (1-3%), abdominal pain, cold-like symptoms, cough, diarrhoea, nausea and sore throat.

Rare reactions include black, tarry stools; blood in the urine or stools; confusion; difficulty in breathing or swallowing; hives; irritability; itching, especially of feet or hands; muscle or joint pains; pinpoint red spots on skin; reddening of the skin, especially around ears; severe or continual headache; stiff neck; swelling of eyes, face or inside the nose; swelling of the glands of neck; unusual bleeding or bruising; unusual tiredness or weakness; sudden and severe vomiting. (MEDLINEplus Drug Information:Varicella Virus Live (Systemic) <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/drugsinfo/>)

A VAERS (Vaccine Adverse Events Reporting System) report released in September 2000, showed an adverse events rate of 67.5 per 100,000 doses of vaccine sold between March 1995 and July 1998. Here again it must be mentioned that the rate of reporting of adverse events are extremely under-reported. The adverse events in approximately 4% (about 1 in 33,000 doses) were regarded as serious, including shock, convulsions, encephalitis, thrombocytopenia and 14 deaths. The reported effectiveness is 80%.

So, here we have a situation where there is a vaccine, with significant side effects against an illness that is very mild. What is the point? Let the children catch the illness, let them develop full permanent immunity and this will protect them as adults because they suffer badly if they catch the illness.