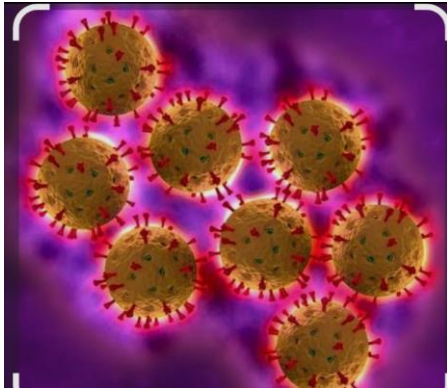


Rising rotavirus cases highlight importance of childhood vaccination



With a rising number of rotavirus cases being reported across the country and in New Jersey in USA this spring, experts from Hackensack Meridian Children's *Health* are urging parents to ensure their children are vaccinated against this common and potentially severe illness. Rotavirus is a contagious virus that can cause gastroenteritis, an inflammation of the stomach and intestines. Symptoms include severe watery diarrhea, vomiting, fever, and abdominal pain, which can lead to dehydration, hospitalization, and – in rare cases – death.

Before the introduction of the rotavirus vaccine in 2006, nearly every child in the United States was infected with the virus at least once by their 5th birthday. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), this resulted in more than 400,000 doctor visits, more than 200,000 emergency room visits, 55,000 to 70,000 hospitalizations, and 20 to 60 deaths annually in children under five. Since the vaccine's introduction, the CDC estimates that hospitalizations for rotavirus among young children in the U.S. have dropped by 40,000 to 50,000 each year.

For New Jersey in particular, data from the WastewaterSCAN dashboard (a public surveillance tool that tracks infectious disease pathogens in wastewater in real time and utilized by the CDC's Wastewater Monitoring Program) shows a general resurgence across the state.

Vaccination is the most effective tool we have to protect our children from rotavirus. The vaccine has an excellent safety profile and has been proven to prevent severe illness, keeping children out of the hospital and giving parents peace of mind."

Daniel Ruderfer, M.D., chief of pediatric infectious disease, K. Hovnanian Children's Hospital at Hackensack Meridian Jersey Shore University Medical Center (JSUMC), USA

Rotavirus vaccine

"The rotavirus vaccine is a safe and highly effective tool for preventing severe diarrheal disease in young children. We've seen a dramatic decrease in hospitalizations due to rotavirus since the vaccine's introduction, which means fewer children are suffering from the serious complications of the illness, such as dehydration," notes Harpreet Pall, M.D., chief medical officer at JSUMC whose specialty is pediatric gastroenterology at K. Hovnanian Children's Hospital.

"We strongly encourage parents to speak with their pediatrician to ensure their children are protected," adds Dr. Pall, who is also a professor of pediatrics at the Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine.

The rotavirus vaccine is given orally in two or three doses, depending on the brand, starting when a baby is two months old. It is crucial for infants to receive the first dose before 15 weeks of age and to complete the series before they turn 8 months old.

"As pediatricians, our goal is always prevention first. The rotavirus vaccine is a cornerstone of our infant immunization schedule because it prevents a common, miserable, and potentially dangerous illness. Before the vaccine, our emergency rooms saw a constant flow of dehydrated infants. Today, it's a largely preventable disease. We urge all parents to ensure their baby gets this simple but life-saving protection," says Stefan Hagmann, M.D., chief of pediatric infectious diseases at Hackensack Meridian Hackensack University Medical Center, and professor of Pediatrics, Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine.

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