

Immunization Program Update:

From the office of the Medical Officer of Health, Calgary Zone

Rotavirus Vaccine for Infants

Date: May 27, 2015

Context:

Effective June 1, 2015, rotavirus vaccine will be added to the Routine Immunization Program in Alberta. In an effort to decrease the burden of rotavirus illness in Alberta, public health will begin offering rotavirus vaccine to children at their 2 month and 4 month immunization appointments as of June 1, 2015.

Rotavirus is a leading cause of acute infectious diarrhea in infants and young children, and affects approximately 95% of children by the age of 3 to 5 years. The incidence of disease is highest in children between 6 and 24 months of age, causing the majority of childhood gastroenteritis requiring hospitalization.

Rotavirus is highly infectious due to the small amount of virus needed to cause illness and the prolonged viral shedding in the stool (from a few days before up to 21 days after onset of symptoms; peak shedding is 7 to 10 days). The virus is transmitted by the fecal-oral route and through close person-to-person contact. It can also be transmitted through fomites (e.g. toys). Good hand washing, particularly after changing diapers, before food preparation and especially before direct contact with an immune compromised individual will help to decrease the spread of the virus.

Actions:

With the implementation of this new vaccine, it is important to ensure vigilance in reporting of possible adverse events following immunization. Intussusception (IS) is particularly of interest with rotavirus vaccine.

- IS in infancy is rare, peaking in the first year of life and occurring at a background rate of about 34 infants per 100,000 per year.
- Post-marketing surveillance for IS following introduction of routine infant rotavirus vaccine programs in some countries, but not the US, suggests a small increased risk of IS, mainly 1-7 days following the first dose, in the range of 1:50,000 immunized infants.
- The Global Advisory Committee on Vaccine Safety has reviewed the data and indicated that the benefits of the vaccine outweigh the potential risks.

Please notify the Calgary Zone Communicable Disease Unit at (403) 955-6750 or the Medical Officer of Health on call at (403) 264-5615 of any recently immunized infants who present with the following symptoms that may be consistent with intussusception:

- severe sudden stomach pain
- persistent vomiting
- blood in the stool
- swollen abdomen

Additional References:

- Alberta Health Services. Immunization Program Standards Manual. www.albertahealthservices.ca/10802.asp
- ImmunizeAlberta – immunization resources for parents. www.immunizealberta.ca
- Alberta Health Services. Medical Officers of Health webpage. www.albertahealthservices.ca/7082.asp

If you have further questions, please contact the Medical Officer of Health at (403) 955-6800.