

Unprotected People: #104

Rotavirus

Two Children Hospitalized with Rotavirus

The Immunization Action Coalition (IAC) publishes Unprotected People Reports about people who have suffered or died from vaccine-preventable diseases.

Rotavirus is a virus that causes severe diarrhea, mostly in babies and young children. In developing countries, rotavirus infection is a major cause of childhood death and is responsible for approximately a half million deaths annually among children younger than 5 years. There are vaccines to prevent rotavirus. Be sure to protect your child from serious illness caused by rotavirus by getting him or her vaccinated.

Originally published by the Vaccine Education Center at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP), the following report is reprinted with permission of the author Brooke Matthys and CHOP.

It was late in the evening when I realized that my 2-year-old daughter was very sick. She lay on the couch not moving, just staring off into the distance. We rushed to the urgent care clinic where she received IV fluids that seemed to perk her up. Filled with relief we went home. The next day however, our beautiful daughter was once again on the couch unable and unwilling to move. She had been vomiting and suffering from diarrhea for three days. This time we went straight to the emergency room. She was dehydrated and would once again need IV fluids. They attempted to start an IV line in her left arm, but ended up blowing all three viable veins. They then tried her right arm, her hands, her feet and even her forehead, but all 12 attempts failed. She was so dehydrated that starting an IV was next to impossible.

I can't tell you the pain I felt in my heart as I watched my daughter suffer. Weak and scared, all she could do was cover her head with her "blankie" as they stuck her again and again. She was so dehydrated her little eyes couldn't even produce tears as she cried. There was talk of calling in the NICU team to make an attempt to find a vein, then talk of calling in the vascular team and even talk of hydrating her by drilling directly into her bone marrow. My heart broke as I watched helplessly.

Diagnosis and prevention

What was causing all of this? Why was my child so sick? It wasn't until the next day, after we had been transferred to a children's hospital and the vascular team had established an IV, that we

found out rotavirus was the cause. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, rotavirus is the most common cause of wintertime diarrhea and vomiting. It is characterized by a low-grade fever followed by three to eight days of vomiting and diarrhea, sometimes accompanied by abdominal pain. It is a highly contagious virus that is usually transferred by fecal-oral contact and can live for days on hard surfaces. Rotavirus is a preventable disease. There are currently two different vaccines on the U.S. market, both of which have proven to be safe and effective. This immunization was of course one of those my daughter was supposed to have gotten at the Platte County Health Department [Missouri].

I couldn't believe it. My older children had suffered from rotavirus, but they had never been this ill. It was at this moment that I had a flash back. I was sitting in my doctor's office rolling my eyes at the thought of taking my children to the Platte County Health Department for yet more vaccines. My child was paying a high price for my foolish decision, and unfortunately, she wouldn't be the only one.

Just a few short hours after I had returned to the hospital and heard the diagnosis, our friend, who was home babysitting our other three children, called to say that my 8-month-old son was not doing well. Instinctively, I knew that he too was suffering from rotavirus as I had been splitting my time between home and the hospital. When she called to say he had gotten worse, I met her at the urgent care clinic. That night I took my second ambulance ride in two days. Like his sister, my son was severely dehydrated and needed IV fluids and close monitoring. I now had two children suffering because of me.

My husband and I spent four sleepless days and nights in the hospital with our two young children, just five rooms apart. We would meet occasionally in the hallway to trade rooms and get updates. It was a long and stressful ordeal that I would not wish on any child or parent. The worst part was that it was totally preventable. If I had taken the time to have my children immunized against rotavirus, this could have all been avoided. Watching your children suffer is awful, but knowing that you could have prevented it, is much worse.