

Reye's Syndrome has mysteriously re-surfaced

By RENNIE MACKENZIE

Thomson News Service

OTTAWA—A mysterious, often deadly, disease that strikes children and teenagers and caused a public health scare in parts of the country a decade ago has resurfaced.

After an apparent dormancy of several years, five deaths attributed to Reye's Syndrome last year have been confirmed by the Reye's Syndrome Foundation of Canada. The still rare disorder attacks children afflicted with viral diseases such as influenza and chicken pox and has been linked to common painkiller products such as Aspirin, Anacin, Excedrin, Bufferin and Alka Seltzer. The products are still considered safe for adults.

It is fatal in up to 30 per cent of all cases—up to 45 per cent in the U.S.—and can cause permanent brain damage in survivors. Its cause is still unknown.

The foundation's director, Allan Gee of London, Ont., could offer no explanation for the new cases in southwestern Ontario, Saskatchewan, British Columbia and Newfoundland. But he suspects it may be carelessness on the part of parents who are not reading the warning labels on the products and may be treating feverish children with the popular analgesics.

Gee explains the foundation has been attempting to track the disorder but is hampered by the fact that three provinces—Manitoba, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island—do not report suspected Reye's cases. Statistics are not maintained by the federal government which files reports of Reye's in with data on other rare diseases.

Efforts to maintain statistics are further frustrated by the fact Reye's cases are not always detected in areas that do not have full medical services, he added. The disease is often incorrectly diagnosed or confused with others such as spinal meningitis which display some similar symptoms, he explained.

Gee, who lost his 14-year-old daughter Stephanie to the disease in 1983, said the number of deaths attributed to Reye's in the country never exceeded 100 in any one year. But national attention was riveted on Nova Scotia in 1981 when the deaths of 35 children caused a public health scare.

Since then, the disease has been linked to ASA, the common term for the acetylsalicylic acid painkiller, and a genetic deficiency, Gee said. A link with aerial spraying in farm and forest regions has been long suspected but never confirmed, he added. Research is continuing on the genetic link.

The incidence of Reye's dropped off sharply in the mid-1980s after the federal government started a public education campaign and drug manufacturers began printing warning labels on ASA products.

But reports of new cases coincide with federal attempts to finally remove all children's ASA products from store shelves and standardize the warnings on labels containing the 100-year-old drug.

Most drug stores in the country have removed the children's products from the shelves and now stock them behind the pharmacists' counters. But under existing regulations, the items can be stocked in grocery and corner stores in some provinces, explained Betty-Ann Rafuse, acting chief of drug regulatory affairs at Health and Welfare Canada. ASA products for adults will still be available on the shelves, but all will carry the standardized warning.

Rafuse said the tighter regulations will be introduced this year. Manufacturers, many of whom voluntarily began printing warnings on their products in 1985, helped draft the new regulations.

The warnings, which have not all been identical, in most cases suggest consumers not administer the analgesic to children except on the advice of a doctor. Physicians recommend the alternative acetaminophen products, but ASA is required if the child suffers from arthritis or certain other afflictions, Rafuse said.

The disorder was first identified as a specific illness in 1963 by Australian pathologist Dr. R.D.K. Reye. Prior to that it was incorrectly diagnosed as another disease or an unknown ailment.

The Reye's Syndrome Foundation was established in Canada in 1980 to publicize and promote research into the disease. It once had between 300 and 400 members across the country, but as reports of Reyes faded in the latter part of the decade,

membership declined. It now has 150 members.

Watch on Reye's Syndrome

What are the symptoms of Reye's Syndrome? Health and Welfare Canada and the Canadian Pediatric Society advise parents to watch for:

- *persistence or resurgence of symptoms of the original viral illness;
- *personality changes in the child or teenager (hyperactivity, aggression, disorientation, anxiety);
- *frequent or persistent vomiting, convulsions, delirium, possibly leading to a coma.

If you suspect your child may

have Reye's, call a doctor immediately or seek emergency medical treatment.

Never give a drug containing acetylsalicylic acid (ASA) to a

child, especially if the child has the flu or chicken pox, without consulting a doctor. Reye's is rare but fatal in 20 to 30 per cent of all cases.

Board replies

Directly refuting the often quoted Ministry of Education drop out figure of 30 per cent, an extensive Halton Board of Education study has pegged the Halton Board of Education drop-out rate at less than five per cent.

The Halton Board of Education Retention Study tracked the progress of all 2,862 students leaving grade 8 in 1988 until December 19, 1991. Of the students, 142 withdrew from school. The tracking was done using the Board's computerized Student Administration System.

Dean Fink, Superintendent of Instructional Services, highlights a number of reasons for the high retention rate. He notes that, "School retention is affected by what's happening in our society and economy. The recession and high unemployment have no doubt influenced student retention in Halton for the last few years. He went on to stress that, "However, since 1988, many regional programs have had an impact on successful programming for at-risk students. The emphasis on General Level programming, the infusion of school based social workers, and the focus on behavior intervention programs have all had positive results".

Director of Education, Bob Williams, adds that "We have consistently argued that this mythical 30 per cent drop-out figure we hear so often, simply doesn't apply to our Board. This retention study validates our belief and the results are a testament to the hard work of our staff, students and community."

This study was presented to the trustees of the Halton Board of Education at their regular meeting on Jan. 30.



Hunzinger's heart

Brennan Hunzinger of Georgetown, who is almost six, holds a valentine close to his heart. Brennan was one of many children who made valentines' cards during a craft session at Georgetown library. (Herald Photo)



THE CORPORATION OF THE
Town of Halton Hills

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ROAD RECONSTRUCTION

Notice is hereby given pursuant to Section 301 of the Municipal Act, being Chapter 302 of the Revised Statutes of Ontario, 1980, that the Council of the Town of Halton Hills, at its meeting to be held in the Civic Centre at 7:00 p.m., Monday, March 30, 1992 will consider the passing of by-laws for the following projects:

1. Todd Road Reconstruction, Phase 2
Mountainview Road to the C.N.R. Spur Line
2. Confederation Street Reconstruction
Wildwood Road to Karen Drive
3. 5 Side Road Culvert Extension and Approach Work
Concession 9, Lots 5 and 6

Plans detailing these projects and the proposed by-laws are available for viewing during normal business hours at the Engineering Department office. Any inquiries should be directed to Mr. R.A. Goddard, C.E.T., Engineering Department at 873-2600, extension 310.

The Council will hear, in person, or by their counsel, any person who claims that their lands will be prejudicially affected by the said by-laws, and who applies to be heard. Persons wishing to be heard should notify the Clerk's Department no later than noon, Thursday, March 26, 1992.

R.C. Austin, P. Eng.
Town Engineer
The Corporation of the
Town of Halton Hills
1 Halton Hills Drive
P.O. Box 128
Halton Hills (Georgetown)
Ontario L7G 5G2

AD NO. 1398

ACTON SOCIAL SERVICES AND INFORMATION CENTRE



SUPPLEMENTS TO THE OLD AGE SECURITY

In January, seniors who have been receiving the supplement to the Old Age Security will be sent a form entitled "Application for Renewal of Guaranteed Income Supplement or Spouses Allowance 1992/1993."

Completing this application—Complete and return this application by March 31. If it is not received in time for processing, your April cheque will be cut back to the basic Old Age Security amount of \$374.07 (which will be slightly more in April). The amount will be re-adjusted when the application is received and any retro-active payments will be made, but for seniors receiving supplements, to have their cheque cut would be a hardship, even though temporary.

Wait for necessary papers—You must have the stubs from the February cheques of the Canada Pension Plan or other pension, and the bank statement of how much interest you have received. All of this has to be declared so please wait until you have this information telling you exactly what you received in 1991. The same amounts must be used in your Income Tax Return, so be sure to keep the stubs together in a safe place. If your supplement form figures differ from those on your Income Tax Return it will be noticed by Income Security and will result in an adjustment of your cheque later on.

What to include—When filling out the application do not declare your Old Age Security supplements or Spouses Allowance received. You need only declare your "private" income, which includes Canada Pension, Work's Pensions, Insurance and Bank Interest etc. If you have queries or are having difficulties completing this application call Income Security toll-free at 1-800-265-9480 (from 519 area code) or 1-800-387-5280 (from 416 area code). These phone lines are often busy, so you should persevere when calling or call at 8:00 a.m. when the office first opens. If you have further problems or have tried completing the application and are still having difficulties, our staff here at Acton Social Services can give you some assistance. You can drop into our office at 19 Willow St. North in Acton or call 853-3310+Monday to Friday 8:30 to 4:30.

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