Rotavirus Vaccine

What is rotavirus?

Rotavirus is a common infection that causes vomiting and diarrhea in infants and children. Rotavirus is very contagious. Most children are infected with rotavirus at least once by five years of age. Rotavirus infection is a major cause of visits to health care providers and hospital-stays for infants and children under 5 years of age in Ontario. Deaths in Ontario due to rotavirus are rare. Symptoms include fever, vomiting, watery diarrhea and stomach pain which may last from 3 to 8 days. Rotavirus can lead to loss of body fluids (dehydration) that may require medical care. Children with weakened immune systems may experience more severe illness for a longer period of time.

Who is eligible to receive the publicly funded rotavirus vaccine (Rotarix™)?

In Ontario, Rotarix™ is a publicly funded two-dose series recommended for infants at 2 and 4 months of age. The vaccine series should be completed by 24 weeks of age. Rotarix™ is a live vaccine given by mouth. The vaccine form of rotavirus can be in the stool of infants for up to 10 days after vaccination. To prevent the spread of the live vaccine virus, anyone caring for the immunized baby should wash their hands frequently especially after changing diapers.

Who should not receive the rotavirus vaccine?

Infants should not receive the vaccine if they have:

- an allergy to the vaccine or any of its components (Dulbecco's Modified Eagel Medium, disodium adipate, sucrose);
- a condition or disease that weakens their immune system:
- "Severe Combined Immunodeficiency Disorder" (SCID);
- a history of intussusception (a condition where the bowels twist and become blocked);
- uncorrected congenital abdominal disorders (such as Mechel's diverticulum);
- received blood products, including immunoglobulin, within 42 days.

Consult with your health care provider if your child has a severe allergy to latex. Vaccination should be temporarily delayed in infants suffering from fever, diarrhea and/or vomiting. **You should always discuss the benefits and risks of any vaccine with your health care provider or local public health unit.**

Are there side effects from the vaccine?

Most babies who get Rotarix™ do not have any complications. Your child may become irritable or have mild, temporary diarrhea after getting a dose. Rarely, babies may experience an allergic reaction such an itchy skin rash, shortness of breath and swelling of the face or tongue. Severe reactions are very rare and may include a slight increased risk of bowel obstruction (intussusception).

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When should I call my health care provider?

If your child experiences stomach pain with severe crying, vomiting, blood in the stool, weakness and irritability within 7 days after receiving the vaccine, see a health care provider immediately.
Call your health care provider or go to the nearest hospital emergency department of your child has any of the following reactions within three days of receiving the vaccine:

- hives
- swelling of the face or mouth
- trouble breathing, hoarseness or wheezing
- high fever (over 40°C)
- convulsions or seizures
- severe stomach pain, persistent vomiting, blood in stools, a swollen belly

Who should I talk to if I have any questions?

For more information please contact your doctor/nurse practitioner or Renfrew County and District Health Unit Health Info Line at 613-735-8666 or 1-800-267-1097 Ext. 666.

Your record of protection

After your child receives any immunization make sure his/her personal immunization record (Yellow Card) is updated. Keep it in a safe place!

Renfrew County and District Health Unit
7 International Drive
Pembroke, Ontario K8A 6W5
613-735-8666 or 1-800-267-1097, Ext. 666.

Adapted from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. Rotavirus Vaccine Questions and Answers for Parents and Caregivers (July 2011).

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