

News Release

First Canadian Registry: an important tool to understand the prevention of RSV, a potentially serious virus that affects infants

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ALBERTA - A team of researchers led by Dr Ian Mitchell a pediatric respirologist from Alberta Children's Hospital and a neonatologist Dr. Bosco Paes at McMaster Children's Hospital has created Canada's first patient registry for RSV, a respiratory virus that is the most common reason for the hospitalization of infants in the first two years of life. The registry, which is being presented today at the Pediatric Academic Societies annual meeting in Baltimore, is allowing doctors to monitor and evaluate the utilization and effectiveness of a medication called palivizumab which helps to prevent RSV (Respiratory Syncytial Virus.)

During 2006-08, 24 hospitals across Canada registered a total of 2,910 babies who are considered high risk for RSV. Risk factors for RSV include: premature birth (less than 35 weeks gestation), less than six months old in November (the start of the annual RSV season), chronic lung disease (requiring oxygen or medical therapy), and significant congenital heart disease. The palivizumab compliance rate was high with 77.8 per cent of the babies receiving at least four injections between September and June (ideally, high risk patients receive monthly injections between November and April during the peak of the RSV season.)

No serious adverse affects were identified, but 159 of the infants required a total of 194 hospitalizations for respiratory tract infections -- a hospitalization rate of 5.5 per cent. Not all of those hospitalizations involved RSV however. The cases that were RSV positive accounted for only 0.8 per cent of the total, down from 1.4 per cent in 2006-07 when rates ranging from 1.3 per cent and 5.3 per cent were previously reported.

"The rates of RSV hospitalization may be decreasing for various reasons," says Dr. Paes. "High compliance with palivizumab, changes in the prevalence of RSV, changes in hospital admission criteria, and parental education regarding prevention may all be contributing to this drop.

"By establishing a registry, we will be able to gather information and build knowledge that will help us reduce the sometimes very serious chest infections in high risk children that are caused by RSV."

Respiratory Syncytial Virus or RSV is a common virus found in secretions. It can spread easily from person to person by kissing, touching, coughing or sneezing. People can have the virus and pass it on even if they do not feel sick. RSV can live on objects such as toys and cribs for up to six hours. By age two, almost all children have had RSV. For most children and adults, RSV is a mild illness like a cold. However, some babies and young children with health problems can become very sick.

RSV begins like a cold, with mild symptoms such as a runny or stuffy nose, sneezing or fever. In some children, the symptoms can quickly get worse and they require hospitalization. However, most children get better with rest, drinking lots of liquids and taking medication for fever. Antibiotics cannot help, because they do not work.

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McMaster Children's Hospital (MCH) is one of the top pediatric academic health sciences centres in Canada offering specialized care to more than 150,000 children each year from a region that includes Hamilton and extends from Niagara to Kitchener-Waterloo and beyond. With 142 acute care beds, 40 pediatric clinics and a full range of specialized inpatient services, MCH is home to one of the country's largest Neonatal Intensive Care Units and state-of-the-art facilities for performing minimally invasive surgery. MCH is internationally recognized for its work in many areas including neurometabolic/ neuromuscular disorders and childhood obesity. MCH recently opened a new 22-bed inpatient mental health unit which is the largest unit of its kind in Ontario.

Founded in 1989, MCH has rapidly become a leader in pediatric evidence-based care, collaborative research and innovative education. In 2008, MCH and McMaster University launched the McMaster Child Health Research Institute aimed at conducting groundbreaking research, with a focus on the long-term effects of childhood illness.

McMaster Children's Hospital is an integral part of the Hamilton Health Sciences family of hospitals.