

Childhood disease can be dangerous

# Rubella cases rise across nation

By SARAH E. WHITE

Reported cases of rubella (German measles), a dangerous disease among children, are up over last year's figures and many of the cases this year occurred on college campuses.

Nationally, 19,414 cases of rubella were reported by November 26 of this year. For the same period of the last year, 11,492 cases were reported.

Almost four times as many cases of rubella were reported this year as were reported last year in November 5.

Rubella is a childhood disease that causes little if any discomfort to the victim. The symptoms are a fever and a headache. These symptoms can be undetectable in one person or may be diagnosed as rubella when they really result from an allergy.

The danger of rubella is to unborn children. The virus can cause malformations of the fetus if a pregnant woman contracts the disease in the first three months of pregnancy.

The virus "likes" nerve tissue and damages the central nervous system of the fetus while it is in its early development, said Dr. Claude Goswick, director of Texas A&M University's Beutel Health Center. A pregnant woman could be unaware of having rubella and her child could develop many problems. These include congenital cataracts, deafness, mental retardation, heart disease, anemia, hepatitis, psychomotor retardation, delayed speech development and deafness.

Goswick said as many as 80 percent of women who are exposed and contract rubella in their first three months of pregnancy give birth to children with defects.

Research shows the incidence of fetal infection in the first trimester of pregnancy varies from 47 to 90 percent.

Rubella can be transmitted very easily and easily. If an infected child is walking down the street coughing and a pregnant woman does not know she is pregnant, she can contract rubella.

Children are not the only carriers of rubella. Many cases reported this year were on college campuses, said Walch, public health adviser of the immunization division of the Texas Department of Health.

Goswick said college campuses at Texas A&M are active areas for the virus because people are close together in crowded classrooms and

buildings. He said he has seen a handful of rubella cases this calendar year. He added that he expected more of an epidemic because the disease passes so quickly. Some students with rubella may not have noticed the symptoms, had the symptoms or gone to the health center for treatment.

Although Goswick said the risks of rubella outbreaks and possible fetal infection can warrant a mass immunization program for students, financial and legal problems surface quickly.

The vaccine costs money and the program must be financed.

Because it is limited, state money is restricted to funding the vaccine for measles, mumps and rubella for the susceptible 15-month through 5-year-old children. State supplied rubella vaccine cannot be given to person over 12 years.

The health center also encounters legal problems with the mass immunizations of women in the child-bearing age.

The vaccination gives the person a case of rubella. Therefore, if a woman in the child-bearing age group is vaccinated, and pregnant, the child can be born deformed. Usually a woman in that age group must sign a release for the administering agency saying that she is not pregnant and will not get pregnant for three months following the immunization. This precaution is taken because it is not known what damage the vaccine may have on the fetus.

Mass immunization of men has no legal complications because men cannot be adversely affected by the vaccine. Immunizing men would prevent the disease being carried to pregnant women. However, financing the program is still a problem and Goswick said students are not usually responsive to mass immunization campaigns.

Goswick said he encourages men to go ahead and have the disease rather than pay the cost of the vaccination.

Alternative solutions included immunizing school children and blood titer (HI) examinations for women in the child-bearing age group.

State law requires all elementary school children be immunized against rubella.

Bryan schools allow new students two weeks to get rubella immunizations after their arrival. The schools' immunization records are not complete at this time. The school nurse

refused to comment.

Diane Chester, A&M Consolidated Middle School nurse, said with the exception of new students moving into the area, all elementary and middle school students are immunized against rubella.

She explained that the school usually allows new students 10 days to get the vaccination. Many times they must wait for the child's immunization records to arrive from the previous school. If they have not complied by this time, the school sends a final notice and turns the problem over to the school principal who will call the parents and give them time to comply. Finally the child is removed from school until the parents comply.

Chester said the A&M schools are above the 90 percentile ranking in all immunization.

The blood test is the alternative to mass immunization of women in the child-bearing age group. This test determines whether the woman has antibodies to rubella or not. If she has antibodies she does not need the vaccination; if she does not have antibodies, she should be immunized immediately. If, however, she is pregnant and has been exposed to rubella, abortion is legal because the baby may be born with a defect.

The health center will give titers, but the student pays the \$9 cost.

The Texas Department of Health began a rubella screening program in August which consists of titer tests for women aged 18 to 30. In some cases younger females are tested. Though scheduled to end in October, the tests are being continued because of the 5,000 allotted tests, only 1,087 were filled by the end of October.

Hopefully, 90 percent of the women will have an antibody against rubella, Walch said. If there are less, the department will probably make a recommendation for further rubella screening, he said.

The Brazos County health units was allotted 200 titer tests which

they give free. A spokesman for the unit said they are nearing the 200 mark now. They only give the test to females who know they have not had the shot.

Rubella will never be handled with an epidemic approach, Walch says.

A Texas State Department of Health pamphlet reports the last major rubella epidemic occurred in 1964. Thirty thousand miscarriages or stillbirths and 20,000 children were born with defects as a result. The pamphlet estimates that it will cost over \$3 billion dollars to take care of and educate these children until they are 18 years old.



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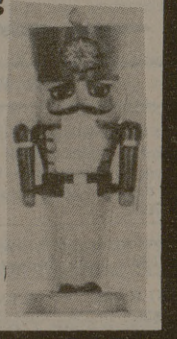
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# EES helps people fight fuel cost

By MARGIE KOVAR

When contact with the masses is difficult, try to reach the individuals. This is the strategy used by the newly organized Texas Energy Extension Service (EES) to help people fight high fuel use and costs.

"We are trying to reach specific groups rather than large groups of people and are urging them to conserve energy," said Dr. Stephen Riter, director of the statewide program with headquarters on the Texas A&M University campus.

Area offices are located in San Antonio, El Paso, Arlington, Houston and Lubbock and are designed to work with specific groups. One program is being carried out at Prairie View A&M and is designed to reach people with limited resources.

Incredible percentages of these people's budgets go to energy bills for heating and transportation," said Riter. "Therefore, they have to do without other things. We are using their peers to

teach them to save fuel and lower their bills by doing such things as fixing broken windows and using wood for heating fuel.

"After all, about 18 percent of the state's population is below the poverty level."

Offices in El Paso, San Antonio and Arlington are run by the University of Texas System. The Lubbock office is under the direction of the Texas Agricultural Extension Service. The University of Houston runs the Houston office and has geared its program toward hospitals.

"This extension service is a pilot program," said Larry Perline, manager of the main office at Texas A&M. "After two years there will be an evaluation to see how the program is working."

Pamphlets have been printed for each of the groups with advice on fuel conservation in such areas as building construction, insulation and solar energy use.

The EES is one of 10 state programs funded by a \$1.1 million federal grant.



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