



## Reye's Syndrome

### What is Reye's syndrome?

Reye's syndrome is a rare but serious condition that primarily affects children and may follow a viral illness such as the flu (influenza) or chickenpox (varicella). While Reye's syndrome can affect all organs in the body, it most commonly causes swelling of the brain and a large build up of fat in the liver.

### Who gets Reye's syndrome?

The illness usually occurs in children but can occur at any age.

### Is Reye's syndrome contagious?

Reye's syndrome is not contagious.

### What are the symptoms of Reye's syndrome?

Early symptoms usually begin suddenly about 1 week after a viral illness (such as chickenpox or flu) and can include persistent or continuous vomiting, followed by personality changes, confusion, convulsions (extreme jerking or shaking) and loss of energy. The symptoms of Reye's syndrome can often seem like other illnesses such as encephalitis (swelling of the brain or spinal cord) or meningitis (swelling of the lining that protects the brain and spinal cord); therefore, it can be difficult to diagnose.

### What causes Reye's syndrome?

No one knows what causes Reye's syndrome; however, studies have shown that using aspirin (salicylate-containing medication) to treat a viral illness (such as chickenpox or flu) can increase the risk of developing Reye's syndrome in children.

### What is the treatment for Reye's syndrome?

There is no specific treatment for Reye's syndrome. Therapy is geared towards prevention of further brain swelling and other complications. Some people recover completely, while others may have permanent brain problems. It has been shown that treatment started early can lead to a better result.

### How can I prevent Reye's syndrome?

Never give a child under 18 years of age aspirin (salicylate-containing medication) unless told to do so by your healthcare provider. Keep in mind that salicylates can be found in a wide range of over-the-counter medications such as Pepto-Bismol and compounds containing oil of wintergreen and should not be given to a child with a cold or fever.