

For Health Professionals

Health Alerts

Health Advisory #91 - Cluster of fulminant hepatic failure of unknown etiology in Queens, NY - August 2, 2004

Please Distribute to All Clinical Staff in Pediatrics, Primary Care, Critical Care, Gastroenterology/Hepatology, Infectious Diseases, Emergency Medicine, Family Medicine, Laboratory Medicine and Infection Control

The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) is investigating three cases of fulminant hepatic failure of unknown etiology in children aged 9, 13 and 18 years. Onset dates are between July 5th and July 17th 2004 and all have tested negative for hepatitis A, B and C.

All three children were previously healthy and live in Queens but not in close proximity to one another. Interviews with family members and review of their medical records have not uncovered any common exposures to date. Surveillance has not identified additional suspect cases.

Fulminant hepatic failure results from acute, massive hepatocellular necrosis or from sudden, severe impairment of hepatocellular function. Patients typically have no evidence of prior liver dysfunction. The causes of fulminant hepatic failure include viral infection, drug and toxin exposures and autoimmune disorders. Approximately 50% of cases are caused by acute viral hepatitis, including hepatitis A, B, C, D and E, as well Epstein Barr virus, herpes simplex virus, and enteroviruses. Hepatotoxic drugs may be responsible for up to 25% of cases, with acetaminophen as the most common cause.

To help identify additional cases and whether a common exposure exists, please report all cases of unexplained severe or fulminant hepatitis in children and young, previously health adults (ages 0-25) diagnosed since June 2004 to the Erie County Department of Health (ECDOH) at (716) 858-7697 (Monday - Friday, 8:30 AM - 4:00 PM) or (716) 898-4225 (Weekends, Evenings and Holidays).