

Necrotizing enterocolitis in infants

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R McCormick¹, M Raizenne, A-M Ugnat

An outbreak of necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC) in premature infants in the United States associated with the consumption of SimplyThick[®], a thickening product, occurred in May 2011. Designed in partnership with the Public Health Agency of Canada, a one-time survey was sent to all CPSP participants to measure whether clinicians recommend the use of a thickening product for infants younger than one year and to document if Canadian cases of NEC were seen in the previous six months.

The survey response rate was 28% (741/2,660). Seventeen percent of respondents indicated having seen an infant hospitalized with NEC in the previous six months. Of those respondents, 77% had seen less than five cases, 12% reported five to 10 cases, and 9% reported more than 10 cases. Of note, 2% did not specify the number of cases seen.

Results showed that almost one-third (30%) of respondents have recommended the use of a thickening product for infants younger than one year. There was no question in the survey asking if the infant was premature or full term. Two cases of NEC in infants after the use of SimplyThick[®] were reported. One case, a premature infant (gestational age 27 4/7 weeks) who presented with NEC at 33 5/7 weeks, is deceased. The other case was alive and still in hospital at the time of the survey. Demographic information, including gestational age and age at presentation, was not available.

For a one-time survey, without reminders, a 28% response rate is in keeping with what is found in the literature. Clinicians would recall NEC cases as these are very sick infants requiring intensive care. Through a well-established surveillance network, public health authorities were able to rapidly collect information on an emerging issue.

¹ Principal investigator

Rachel McCormick, Epidemiologist, Outbreak Management Division, Public Health Agency of Canada;
tel.: 519-826-2991; fax: 519-826-2984
