



**CAEP** | Canadian Association  
of Emergency Physicians

**ACMU** | Association canadienne  
des médecins d'urgence

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF EMERGENCY PHYSICIANS STRONGLY SUPPORTS NACI RECOMMENDATION ON ROTAVIRUS VACCINATION**

### **Rotavirus a heavy burden on emergency department resources**

**OTTAWA, Ontario – January 21, 2008** – The Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians (CAEP) applauds the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) for acknowledging in its recommendation published today that "...individual infants and their families are likely to benefit from immunization with [the pentavalent rotavirus vaccine]. The vaccine has been approved for use in infants 6 to 32 weeks of age and should be offered to infants whose parents/guardians wish to reduce the risk of rotavirus."<sup>1</sup>

Gastroenteritis caused by rotavirus is a very common childhood disease that infects 95 per cent of children at least once by the time they are five years old.<sup>2</sup> In its recommendation, NACI also noted that the implementation of a universal rotavirus immunization program of all Canadian infants could be expected to prevent as many as 56,000 cases of rotavirus gastroenteritis, 33,000 physician visits, 15,000 emergency department visits and from 1,000 to 5,000 hospitalizations annually.<sup>3</sup>

In August 2006, Health Canada approved an oral vaccine that contains the five rotavirus strains responsible for approximately 95 per cent of rotavirus disease in Canada. In clinical trials, the vaccine prevented 94 per cent of rotavirus-related emergency department visits.<sup>4</sup>

"Rotavirus does not discriminate. It affects all socioeconomic groups and can wreak havoc in childcare facilities, schools, doctor's offices and hospital emergency departments. Not only is it a common cause of stressful and costly emergency department visits, but its highly contagious nature makes it a common cause of hospital-acquired illness for patients and their siblings visiting the emergency department for any reason. The NACI recommendation is a positive step that may encourage parents to have their children vaccinated and protect them against this potentially serious disease, while also helping prevent its rampant spread and reducing the burden on emergency departments," said Dr. Vincent Grant, Chair, Paediatric Section at CAEP.

- more -

## **Highly contagious and unpredictable disease that can lead to serious complications**

Rotavirus is highly contagious and relatively resistant to most soaps and disinfectants.<sup>5</sup> Symptoms can be mild to severe and generally last for three to nine days with up to 20 episodes of vomiting and/or diarrhea in a 24 hour period.<sup>6,7</sup> Severe diarrhea and vomiting caused by rotavirus can lead to rapid and dangerous depletion of body fluids, which can be life-threatening.<sup>8</sup> Rotavirus is a common reason for the need for intravenous insertion and rehydration in the emergency department.

Rotavirus infection is seasonal from November to June. During the peak months of April and May, up to 78 per cent of children hospitalized for gastroenteritis in Canada are rotavirus-positive.<sup>9,10</sup>

“In our continuous effort to improve the delivery of emergency healthcare in Canada, we want to create awareness about rotavirus infection and its burden on emergency department resources; not to mention the burden on the families of the sick children,” said Dr. Anna Karwowska, Past Chair, Paediatric Section at CAEP. “The rotavirus vaccine would be a welcome addition to childhood vaccines offered through public health programs, since it would not only provide relief to Canadian families, but also greatly reduce the number of stressful and costly emergency department visits,” concluded Dr. Karwowska.

### **About CAEP**

The Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians (CAEP) is a national organization that keeps Canadian emergency physicians informed of developments in the clinical practice of emergency medicine and addresses political and societal changes which affect the delivery of emergency healthcare. In cooperation with other specialties and committees, CAEP plays a vital role in the development of national standards and clinical guidelines that members can use to further enhance the delivery of emergency medical care in their own institutions.

- 30 -

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO SPEAK WITH A MEDICAL EXPERT PLEASE CONTACT:**

Valoree McKay, CEO  
CAEP  
613-523-3343 ext. 15

- more -

---

<sup>1</sup> Canadian Communicable Disease Report. January 2008, volume 34, page 26.

<sup>2</sup> Parashar UD et al. *Emerg Infect Dis* 1998;4(4): 561-70

<sup>3</sup> Canadian Communicable Disease Report. January 2008, volume 34, page 25.

<sup>4</sup> Vesikari T et al. Safety and Efficacy of a Pentavalent Human-Bovine (WC3) Reassortant Rotavirus Vaccine. *N Engl J Med* 2006;354;1:23-33.

<sup>5</sup> Offit P A, Clark, H F. In *Mandell, Douglas & Bennett's Principles and Practice of Infectious Diseases*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Philadelphia, Pa: Churchill Livingstone; 2000. Vol. 2; Chapter 139:1696-1702.

<sup>6</sup> Musher D M, Musher B L. Contagious acute gastrointestinal infections. *N Engl J Med* 2004;351:2417-27.

<sup>7</sup> Matson D O, In *Principles and Practice of Pediatric Infectious Diseases*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Philadelphia, Pa: Elsevier Saunders; 2003. Chapter 232: section 1107.

<sup>8</sup> Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, accessed at <http://www.cdc.gov/nip/diseases/rota/rotavirus.htm>.

<sup>9</sup> Ford-Jones E L, Wang E, Petric M et al. Hospitalization for Community-Acquired, Rotavirus-Associated Diarrhea. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med* 2000;154:578-585.

<sup>10</sup> Rivest P et al. Hospitalizations for gastroenteritis: the role of rotavirus, *Vaccine* 2004;22:2013-2017.