Dr. Luke: Measles

Measles is a virus infection, meaning it comes from something so small it can not be seen by your own eye, only under a very special machine in a laboratory. It has been on earth for a long time, even as long as the 600’s AD. It is very contagious and is considered a “childhood disease.” Measles is still very common and can cause death. The World Health Organization says there were more than 20 million cases in 2006; 242,000 people, mostly children, died from the disease. We are going to talk about how to prevent or stop this disease from happening. It is important to remember there are two types of measles; there is measles which we will talk about first; then there is Ruebella.

Measles gets from one person, or child, to another person by breathing and coughing, or what is called respiratory transmission. It takes ten to fourteen days from the time someone is exposed to measles for them to break out in a rash. Most of the time there is a small white spots inside the throat area; then there is a high temperature of 102-103, then the break out of a rash which starts in the hairline that moves to the face, down the neck, the trunk and arms. In about five to six days the rash fades the same way it appeared, from the hairline down the face, down the neck, trunk and arms. Along with the rash there may be a cough and red eyes.

Sometimes a child might not want to eat or gets diarrhea. This happens more with younger children than older children. Sometimes children will get an ear infection. Another complication can be pneumonia, which is fluid in the lungs. This is the most common cause of a child dying.

There is another very serious complication of the measles; it is a condition known as acute encephalitis. When someone has the measles and then starts to have a bad headache, a stiff neck, drowsiness, a high fever, convulsions, where some shake and they lose consciousness, this is a very serious side effect and medical attention needs to be sought.

Most of the time, measles is considered a childhood illness. However, adults who have never had the disease nor had the vaccine can get the disease. As an adult it can be much worse to have the measles. It is more likely they will have acute encephalitis or the bad headache and stiff neck. This side effect can lead to brain injury and a person can lose their ability to think for themselves, maybe not be able to walk, or have seizures the rest of their life.

Abeta had heard two mothers in the neighborhood talk about measles in the next village. She had a baby who was just 13 months old. Abeta was afraid because she had heard what measles could do. One of the mothers had whispered it might even make the babies die. That night Abeta laid in her bed and thought about what she could do. How could she protect her baby from getting the measles. Then, she remembered someone had told her about a clinic in the next village. Another friend had told Abeta the clinic had given her baby a shot, to protect him from measles and other diseases.

The next morning Abeta walked to the next village with her baby and after stopping to ask directions, found the clinic. The nurse was very kind and explained many things to Abeta. Yes, there was a shot she could give Abeta’s baby to protect her baby. It was called a vaccine. This particular shot had two additional vaccines in it for Rubella and Mumps. The nurse gave the shot in the thigh, or upper leg, of the baby. She explained babies needed to have their shots in their legs until they about four years old.

The nurse explained to Abeta the baby might be fussy and run a low temperature. If this happened she could give the baby acetamenaphen three to four times a day for the next day or two. If the baby ran a high fever, Abeta needed to bring the baby back to the clinic. He might have a complication like we discussed earlier. She reminded Abeta not to give the baby aspirin; it can cause an even worse side effect, known as Guillian-Barre Syndrome which paralyzes people.

The nurse asked Abeta if she and her husband had had measles when they were children. Abeta said she did. The nurse told her she would be immune, or not get the measles. Abeta did not know if her husband had ever had measles; they had never talked about it. The nurse wanted Abeta to ask him; if he had never had the measles, then he needed to come to the clinic so she could give him a shot in his arm to protect him from the measles in case they came to their village. It was very important for him to get protection because if adults get measles, they get more sick and have a high chance of having a major complication like encephalitis of the bad headaches and stiff neck resulting in bad things like seizures.

As Abeta was packing up her baby after his shots, the nursed asked Abeta if she had ever heard about stories by Dr. Luke. Shaking her head, Abeta said no.

The nurse said, "Dr. Luke is a man who lived in ancient times; he wrote many stories about a man named Jesus and they are in a book. In this book Dr. Luke talks about Jesus growing as a young child. He grew in stature, physical growth, wisdom, spiritual wisdom, and in favor with God and man, emotionally. It was important for him to grow to become a man."

"As a man Jesus had a purpose of coming to earth and that was to help stop the outcome of sin. Sin is when we do not do things in our lives the way God wants us to. It does not measure up to God. In this ancient book, called the Bible, in a book called Romans written by Paul, it says everyone has sinned: yes every one of us. Jesus came with a purpose to earth and that purpose was to die on the cross to allow us to be saved from our sins. Instead of us being punished for our sins, Jesus took our place. When we ask Jesus to forgive us of our sins it gives us great joy. It also allows us to have eternal life with Jesus Christ in heaven. And that is great news for you and me."

The nurse told Abeta she could say a prayer like this one if she wanted Jesus to come into her heart:

“Dear Jesus, I have sinned and done wrong. I believe God exists and you are his Son. Jesus, I believe you came to earth to die on the cross for my sins so I can be saved. I believe you arose from the dead after three days and you are still living today. I believe in this and that Jesus can give me new life.”

Abeta knew the nurse was telling her the truth. She said the prayer after she told the nurse she wanted to say the prayer. The nurse told Abeta: “you are now a child of God and will have everlasting life.”

If you too have prayed this prayer then you are now a child of God and will have everlasting life in the presence of Jesus when you get to heaven. It brought great joy to Abeta. It is great news to celebrate.

Abeta went home with much good news. She now understood how she could protect her baby and maybe her husband from getting the measles. Her baby would need one more shot of the measles vaccination when he turned four years old to make sure he had protection as he got older. The nurse told her it was very important to get the second shot. Abeta also understood if her husband had never received the measles shot nor had the measles, he needed to come to the clinic the next day to provide protection to him. Because he was much older, in his twenties, he was at a higher risk of getting a major complication like a neurological side effect which could last the remainder of his life and cause him not to be able to work like he needed to to provide for Abeta and their baby. This would be very sad if there was something Abeta’s husband could take to prevent getting measles and then he did not take it and got very sick and could not work or even died. He could take the shot and that would protect him from the measles.

Abeta was almost out of the village when she remembered her sister who was pregnant. She wondered if she could take the vaccine. Abeta knew she had never had the measles when she was a little girl. She had been at their Aunt’s house when Abeta had the measles as a little girl. She walked back to the clinic to ask the nurse if she should send her sister to the clinic tomorrow.

The nurse was very firm in her answer: no. Her sister should not get the vaccination. The sister needed to stay away from children for several weeks and anyone who had a rash, just in case. After she had the baby, the sister needed to come to the clinic and they would discuss with her when to have the measles vaccination. The nurse told Abeta also that if anyone had HIV they should not get the vaccination either. It would be best for them if they avoided children who might have measles.

Abeta left the clinic with great joy. She had information to take care of her family. She had asked Jesus into her heart to forgive her of her sins. She knew she had eternal life and would live with Jesus in heaven when she passed on. She was now a child of God. That is really good news!