Guidelines for the Child Who Is Cortisol or Steroid Dependent

This handout is to help you learn about cortisol dependency and its treatment. It also covers safety measures to follow at home. If you have any questions, please ask your nurse or doctor.

What does "cortisol dependent" mean?
Cortisol is a hormone made by the adrenal glands. It keeps the body’s blood pressure and blood sugar from dropping too low. It helps the body deal with physical stress. Cortisol dependent means that the adrenal glands cannot make enough (or any) cortisol. Your child must take medicine to replace it.

What is the treatment?
Hydrocortisone is used to replace cortisol. You may also hear your doctors and nurses call this Cortef®. It is taken by mouth 2 – 3 times each day to maintain the level of cortisol in your child’s body. Sometimes it may need to be injected. If your child has asthma or certain illnesses, other medicine is sometimes used.

What should you know about stress and the need for extra hydrocortisone?
In times of stress, your child must receive extra hydrocortisone. Your doctor and nurse will fully explain why this is needed. If your child does not receive the extra hydrocortisone, acute adrenal insufficiency may result. If not treated, this can lead to loss of consciousness, coma, or even death.

Physical stress in this case is defined as fever, surgery, serious injury, or significant illness that your child may have. When the body is under stress, the adrenal glands should make extra amounts of cortisol. Because your child’s glands do not make the extra amount needed, your child needs extra hydrocortisone.

What are the sick day guidelines for your child?
Extra hydrocortisone must be given during times of extreme physical stress such as fever or trauma. Your child’s stress dosing plan follows.

If your child has an illness, fever greater than 100.5°F or a minor injury or sprain, then you should give your child ________ mg of hydrocortisone, by mouth, every 8 hours.

For any of these situations, you will need to give your child the injectable medicine.
- Your child vomits and cannot take anything by mouth. This would include your child vomiting the oral dose within 30 minutes of taking it.
- Your child “looks bad” (pale, sweaty, breathing fast, very tired, not responding), has a serious injury such as a broken bone, or loses consciousness, inject the medicine as ordered and call 911.
Your child’s injectable dose will be ______ mg of _____________________.

What other points should you think about?

- It is a good idea to ask about sick day guidelines during your child’s routine visits so you can be ready for those times.
  - When your child is ill, make sure to give extra fluids to prevent dehydration.
  - If your child needs surgery, major dental work, or has been in an accident, large doses of hydrocortisone will often be needed. Tell the doctor or dentist that your child has cortisol deficiency before any procedure.
  - **For children under 2 years old you should stress dose your child on the days they will be receiving immunizations or vaccinations. For all children stress dosing is required if they have a fever in the days following immunizations.**
  - As a rule, emotional stress does not require increased hydrocortisone.
  - It is helpful for you to review this *Health Facts* each month so that you will know how to follow the guidelines if your child becomes ill.

At that time, you can also check the expiration date on the injectable medicine. You can be certain you have the syringes and needles that you need. Families tell us that reminders on their calendars have helped them to remember.

Your child must wear a medical identification bracelet or necklace to alert people in times of emergency that your child has a cortisol deficiency and is taking hydrocortisone.

**Phone Numbers**

**Endocrine Clinic**, Monday to Friday, 8:00am to 4:30pm *(608) 263-6420*

Nights, weekends, & holidays:
Call *(608) 263-6420*. This will give you the paging operator. Ask for the pediatric endocrine doctor on-call. Leave your name, and phone number with the area code. The doctor will return your call.

If you live out of the area, please call: **1-800-323-8942**.

The Spanish version of this *Health Facts for You* is #6539