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Human herpes virus-6 and febrile convulsions

The role of human herpesvirus type 6 (HHV-6) in paediatric disease is currently being defined (see Archivist 1992, p 500). It is known to be the agent of exanthem subitum (roseola infantum) but the clinical manifestations produced by it are wider than that and include meningitis (see *Archives* 1991, pp 1443-4), hepatitis, lymphadenitis, lymphoproliferative disorder, and haemophagocytic syndrome. Now workers in France have looked at children with febrile convulsions and reported their findings in a letter to the *New England Journal of Medicine* (Michel Segondy and colleagues, 1992; 327: 1099-100). They tested paired sera from 21 children admitted to hospital with febrile convulsions and found evidence of recent HHV-6 infection in six (29%). Only one of these had the clinical features of exanthem subitum. The others mainly had non-specific upper respiratory tract symptoms.

This is, of course, a small series and children admitted to hospital may not be entirely representative of the whole population. Many more data are needed but is a vaccine on the cards? Would such a vaccine be worthwhile? At first sight the prospect of a vaccine that might prevent up to one third of febrile convulsions seems quite attractive but if HHV-6 were to be eliminated would other causes of febrile convulsions expand to fill the gap? No doubt we shall hear more about this virus

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