

**Prema Menon,  
K.L.N. Rao,**

*Department of Pediatric Surgery,  
Postgraduate Institute of Medical  
Education and Research,  
Chandigarh 160 012, India.*

*Correspondence to:*

**Dr. K.L.N. Rao,**  
*Department of Pediatric Surgery,  
Advanced Pediatric Center,  
P.G.I.M.E.R.,  
Chandigarh 160 012, India.  
Email: klnrao@hotmail.com*

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**Betamethasone Abuse in Infancy**

Oral Betamethasone is being prescribed unnecessarily for innocuous conditions like common cold. The ignorant mothers also misuse betamethasone for their babies to make them chubby. These steroid babies develop cushings syndrome, immuno-suppression and serious infections like pneumonia and meningitis. We present two infants with Cushings syndrome due to prolonged betamethasone use.

A four month old male infant born with a birth weight of 2.5 kg presented with chickenpox. On examination, he weighed 11 kg and had cushingoid features. His blood pressure was normal and had multiple papulo-vesicular lesions characteristic of chickenpox. The child had to be treated with oral acyclovir in view of cushingoid features. At fifteen days

of life, a private practitioner had prescribed betamethasone oral drops for upper respiratory tract infection. The mother had noticed increased appetite after betamethasone use and continued the same daily.

A three month old female infant born with a birth weight of 2.6 kg presented with high grade fever for two days associated with multifocal seizures. On examination, she weighed 11 kg (more than 95th centile) and had cushingoid features. Her blood pressure was 80/50 mm Hg. She had an irritable cry and her anterior fontanelle was bulging. CSF showed plenty of pus cells and culture grew H. influenza. The mother had procured 3 vials of oral betamethasone over the counter and had been administering it from birth as a "health tonic". The child was treated with intravenous antibiotics for 10 days and discharged with an advice to stop betamethasone.

The children mentioned above represent

only the tip of the iceberg and a large number of other steroid babies go undetected. Guidelines for dispensing over the counter steroids in developing countries are lacking(1). The irrational prescriptions of steroids as treatment for common cold both by practitioners of allopathy and alternative systems of medicine are increasing. Kshirsagar, *et al.* estimated that more than 30% of prescriptions by medical practitioners are irrational(2). Apart from the irrational prescriptions, the health awareness among the general public is also lacking to the extent that the rapid weight gain due to steroids, basically a side effect is mistaken for good health. As a result, multiple vials of this drug are bought everyday over the counter. In order to reduce this problem, doctors should undergo continuing medical education

programs highlighting the harmful effects of steroid misuse. The government can enact stringent law for restricting over the counter dispensing of harmful drugs.

**Adhisivam B.,  
Mahadevan S.,**

*Department of Pediatrics,  
Jawaharlal Institute of Postgraduate Medical  
Education and Research (JIPMER),  
Pondicherry 605 006, India.*

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## Cardiac Murmur in Neonates

Murmurs during childhood have been subjected to numerous studies(1), but data concerning murmur at birth and during first year of life, are few. The incidence of cardiac malformation is 6 per 1000 live births, but most are asymptomatic at birth. The prevalence of murmur varies from 0.6% to 47.4% and is inversely related to the size of the study(2). Until preventive measures become available, reduction of infant mortality due to congenital cardiovascular malformations will continue to depend on early recognition of signs of serious heart disease in infants and on effective community-wide use of specialized cardiac services(3). We carried out a study to determine the incidence and clinical significance of murmur heard during routine examination of neonates.

During the study, 2603 healthy newborn babies were screened for the presence of a murmur during routine postnatal rounds. All those who were admitted in NICU or were premature (<37 weeks of gestational age) or any neonate with a risk factor that is known to be associated with increased incidence of congenital heart disease were excluded from the study(4). All those with murmurs underwent echocardiography and color Doppler examination. Murmurs were detected in 62 babies (2.3%) of whom 28 (45%) had a cardiac malformation.

The incidence of murmur was 23.81 per 1000 of normal neonates during the period of study. Of 62 newborns with murmur, 28 had a significant Structural Heart Lesion (SHL), 18 had an insignificant structural heart lesion, *i.e.*, physiological variant that would account for a murmur(5) and 16 had a completely normal echocardiogram and color Doppler