



Community Health Connections

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Fact Sheet

Neuroleptic Malignant Syndrome (NMS)

What is NMS?

NMS is characterized by development of muscle rigidity and fever after taking an antipsychotic medication. There can also be changes in mental alertness, difficulty with drooling or swallowing, problems with blood pressure, and sweating.

What causes NMS?

It is a rare but serious side effect of a drug from a category called neuroleptics or antipsychotics. These are typically used to treat psychotic disorders like schizophrenia.

When does NMS occur?

Typically, symptoms appear in the first 2 weeks after starting a neuroleptic or increasing the dosage of a neuroleptic. It may develop over hours or a few days. It also may occur at any time while on the medicine.

Who is most likely to develop NMS?

Typically, younger individuals and males are at higher risk. People with mental retardation and those with bipolar disorder who are treated with neuroleptics are also at high risk.

How is NMS diagnosed?

In addition to the symptoms above (e.g. fever, muscle rigidity, etc.), people with NMS may have an increase of the muscle enzyme CPK in their blood. There is no specific test that diagnoses an NMS.

What do I do if I think that I or someone I know is developing NMS?

If someone on an antipsychotic develops any of the symptoms of NMS, they should call their doctor immediately. Ask the doctor if this could be early NMS and remind the doctor of the medication that you are taking as well as any recent changes in dosage or medication.

Content Source: Pennsylvania Department of Welfare