

June 25, 2003

Tragic Death of Unborn Child Leads Ohio Couple to Educate Others about Parvovirus B19

Zanesville, Ohio – Seven years ago, Tammy Delancey experienced what every pregnant woman fears: a routine ultrasound showed something was wrong.

After three weeks of testing, Tammy and her husband Darron learned that she had contracted Parvovirus B19, a common childhood illness known as Fifth's Disease. Despite undergoing blood transfusions, they were unable to save the baby who died shortly after birth.

Parvovirus B19 or Fifth's Disease is a mild virus that can be transmitted by aerosol droplets and blood products. The infection can cause a rash and flu-like symptoms in both children and adults. Those most at risk include pregnant women and immunocompromised patients such as transplant recipients. Pregnant women who have been previously exposed to parvovirus are not at risk; however, those not previously infected are subject to a 30 percent chance of infection if exposed and a 5 to 9 percent risk of fetal loss if infected during pregnancy, according to a February 2004 article in the *New England Journal of Medicine* by Drs. Neal S. Young and Kevin E. Brown.

According to Tammy, "I contracted the disease when I volunteered as a room mother at my son's school. If I had only known about the risk, I would have avoided the exposure. My husband and I were shocked at how little people know about this disease."

The risk of infection is considered highest in epidemic years. Based on recent outbreaks in Ohio, Arkansas, New York and Canada, fears are growing that 2004 might represent an epidemic year, which happens every three to four years.

Tammy and Darron are joining efforts with Dr. John Rodis, a leading American expert on Parvovirus B19, to promote public education about the disease. "We want to educate others and, hopefully, prevent another family from going through what we did," says Tammy.

According to Dr. Rodis, who is former chief of obstetrics at Stamford Hospital in Connecticut and an expert on parvovirus, "While half of all adults have already been exposed to the virus and are therefore immune, women not previously exposed are at risk of pregnancy loss and stillbirth and should discuss this risk with their physician. If there is reason for concern, a simple blood test will often be able to determine whether they are at risk." A Food and Drug Administration-approved test is available to establish whether a woman has immunity and a vaccine is currently under development. Approximately 50 percent of adults are immune to the disease.
