Mother 'passed CJD to baby'

67 people have died of the brain disease vCJD

A baby whose mother died of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease is showing symptoms of the same illness, it has been reported.

The 11-month-old girl has been examined by doctors, according to the Sunday Telegraph, and is said to have brain damage and suffer from fits and convulsions.

If the disease is confirmed, it would be the first proof that vCJD, the human form of mad cow disease, can be transmitted from mother to child.

It would support the theory that the disease is hereditary rather than caught by eating infected meat.

But there are also fears that the illness can be transmitted through blood, in this case to the baby while in the womb.

The doctors who examined the baby are reported as saying they cannot be sure she has the illness but that they did not find any other ailment.

Slow growth

Tests carried out on her appendix apparently proved inconclusive in finding traces of vCJD.

The girl is due to undergo further brain scans later this year.

She is said to be growing at half the normal rate for a child her age and suffers from poor sight and abnormally stiff limbs.
However, only a post mortem examination would give conclusive evidence.

Richard Lacey, a professor of medical microbiology at Leeds University, believes it is "inevitable" that mothers infected with vCJD will pass the illness on to their offspring through the placenta.

"The only thing that is uncertain is the scale on which it is happening," he is quoted as saying in the Sunday Telegraph.

The Ministry of Agriculture said in 1996 that a pregnant cow could pass BSE to its unborn calf.

So far, 67 people are known to have died of vCJD, with their ages ranging from 18 to 40.

Internet links:
The BSE inquiry
The UK Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease surveillance unit

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