AZT Linked to Cancer in Mice

But experts pooh-pooh panicked moms

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“No smoking, no drinking,” docs warn pregnant women. So why are they urged to down AZT, a drug suspected of causing cancer? The NIH held a fast and dirty meeting in January at which a panel of AIDS and cancer researchers reviewed some fearful findings from the National Cancer Institute: High-dose AZT, which greatly reduces the chance of mother-to-infant HIV transmission, grew tumors in the offspring of mice during the last trimester of pregnancy. Should women keep taking the drug? “Absolutely,” said Dr. Jack Killen, director of the AIDS division of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. “It’s very clear the benefit of AZT [preventing perinatal transmission] far outweighs the hypothetical risk.”

But the HIV Law Project’s Theresa McGovern, who attended the NIH meeting, said, “It opened with a prefab statement: ’We’re not going to change the recommendations.’ So the panel was gratuitous. Also, Glaxo Wellcome had more time to present data than the NCI. It’s obscene they’re not informing women of this cancer link.” No studies are under way of any drug but AZT for the prevention of mother-to-infant transmission.

No tumors have been found in three-year follow-up studies of kids exposed to AZT in utero. In a similar study by AZT-maker Glaxo Wellcome, no increase in the incidence of tumors was seen in mice.

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