

Fact Sheet

Kawasaki disease



What is Kawasaki disease?

Kawasaki disease is an uncommon disease affecting mainly preschool children, although older children can also get it. The cause is currently not known but research is being done to try and find out. It is probably a severe response to an infection, although we do not yet know which infection. It results in inflammation affecting many different blood vessels all over the body.

Is it catching?

Although it is thought that Kawasaki disease may be caused by an infection, it is **not** easy to catch the disease from someone else. If a child gets Kawasaki disease, it is very rare for the child's brothers or sisters to get the disease.

What are the symptoms of the disease?

All children with Kawasaki disease have a continuous high fever lasting 5 days or more. They may also have some or all of these symptoms:

- Sore, red eyes which are not weepy.
- Red lips (which may be cracked), red tongue or mouth.
- Redness, swelling or peeling of the hands and feet.
- Rash all over the body.
- Swollen glands in the neck.
- Children are often very irritable and may also have a cough, diarrhoea, sore joints and a sore neck.

Other diseases like measles and scarlet fever have symptoms that look just like Kawasaki disease, so it is important to see your doctor.



Child with Kawasaki disease
(red eyes, dry cracked lips, red tongue)

What are the complications?

The inflammation caused by Kawasaki disease can affect a child's heart. If a child is suspected of having this disease, it is important that the child goes to a children's hospital and is seen by a children's heart specialist (cardiologist).

Can the complication be prevented?

The risk of heart complications from Kawasaki disease can be greatly reduced by early treatment. The main treatment is to give antibodies (also called immunoglobulins). The antibodies are prepared by the Red Cross from human blood donations and are very safe. They are given in a drip over several hours and the child is usually better the next day. Aspirin is usually given at the same time to help reduce the inflammation. Occasionally children will still have heart problems, despite early treatment, which means they will need to see a heart specialist for some years. Children who do not have a heart problem with Kawasaki disease will not need any long term follow up.

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Can a child have the disease again?

Once a child has recovered from Kawasaki disease it is very rare for them to have the disease again. Only a small number of children will have it a second time.

Can Kawasaki disease be prevented?

We do not know how to prevent the disease yet. There is a great deal of research happening to identify the cause, although the organism that causes the disease has not been identified. Research is being carried out to find out more about the disease, its cause, treatment and prevention.

For further information

The following websites provide more detailed information about Kawasaki disease:

- The Hospital for Sick Children, Toronto (Canada)
www.sickkids.on.ca/Kawasaki/
- Kawasaki Disease Foundation (USA)
www.kdfoundation.org

Remember

- If you suspect a child has Kawasaki disease, the child must be seen by a children's specialist (paediatrician).

This fact sheet is for education purposes only.
Please consult with your doctor or other health professional
to make sure this information is right for your child.

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