

Let's Talk About...

Kawasaki Disease

Kawasaki [COW-uh-SAH-kee] disease causes inflammation [in-fluh-MAY-shun] (swelling) of the blood vessels in your child's body. No one knows what causes Kawasaki disease, but it usually happens in children younger than 5 years. Sometimes it happens in older children and young adults.

What are the signs and symptoms of Kawasaki disease?

Your child with Kawasaki disease may have a fever as high as 104° F for 5 days or more. They will be very tired and irritable. They may vomit (throw up), have diarrhea (loose stools [pooops]), and stomach pain.

Other signs and symptoms of Kawasaki disease can include:

- A red, patchy rash that may cover their whole body
- Swollen lymph nodes in their neck
- Swollen hands and feet
- Red palms and soles of their feet
- Peeling skin on their fingers and toes
- Red, cracked lips and a very red tongue
- Redness inside their mouth and the back of their throat
- Red, bloodshot eyes

Some children with Kawasaki disease, especially babies, may not have these symptoms.

Can Kawasaki disease be prevented?

No one knows how to prevent Kawasaki disease.



How do I know if my child has Kawasaki disease?

Your child's healthcare provider will examine your child and ask questions about their symptoms. They will also order blood and urine tests and a cardiac [KAR-dee-ak] ultrasound [UHL-truh-sound]. This is a type of imaging test that uses sound waves to show the heart and nearby blood vessels.

How will my child's Kawasaki disease be treated?

Your child will stay in the hospital, and their healthcare provider will order a high dose of aspirin to lower your child's fever. Usually, aspirin is not recommended for children because of the risk of Reye's syndrome, a serious disease that causes swelling in the brain and liver. Kawasaki disease is an exception.

Besides lowering fever in your child with Kawasaki disease, aspirin also helps with their rash and joint pain. Even after the fever goes away, your child will take a small dose of aspirin for several weeks to lower the chance of heart problems that can happen with Kawasaki disease.

Your healthcare provider may also order intravenous [in-truh-VEE-nuhs] gamma globulin [GLOB-yuh-lin] (IVIG) for your child. IVIG can help prevent heart problems. Your child will receive this medicine through an IV (a small tube that goes into the vein) for several hours. This treatment must be given in the hospital.

Some children may need a different type of medicine if they do not get better with IVIG and aspirin.

When can my child come home?

Your child may go home from the hospital after their fever is gone and they receive the medicine that was ordered for them.

How do I take care of my child at home?

Here are things you will need to do for your child when they get home from the hospital:

- Take your child's temperature once or twice a day.
- Give your child the amount of aspirin prescribed by their healthcare provider. Keep giving your child aspirin at home until their healthcare provider tells you to stop.
- Keep your child home from school or daycare until they are well and feel strong enough to return.
- Make an appointment for your child with a cardiologist [kahr-dee-01-uh-jist] (a doctor who specializes in caring for the heart) a few weeks later. They will check to see if your child's heart is healthy again.

Will my child have symptoms at home?

It usually takes 4 to 6 weeks to recover from Kawasaki disease. Your child may have joint pain in their larger joints (ankles, knees). Your child's fever should be gone when they leave the hospital. If they have another fever after coming home from the hospital, call your child's cardiologist.

Are there complications from Kawasaki disease?

Kawasaki disease injures the coronary [KOR-uh-nair-ee] arteries, the blood vessels that bring blood to your child's heart. The arteries can become bigger, and aneurysms [AN-yuh-riz-ums] can form. An aneurysm is when the artery becomes weak and part of it bulges out or "balloons."

Sometimes aneurysms are small and do not cause any problems. With very large aneurysms, there could be blood clots inside the coronary arteries. If blood clots block the arteries, the heart muscle does not get enough oxygen. This can cause angina [AN-jah-nuh] (chest pain) and other problems.

Where can I get more information?

For more information about Kawasaki disease and parent support groups, contact the Kawasaki Disease Foundation: kdfoundation.org.

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