

# Let's Talk About...

## Kawasaki Disease

**Kawasaki** ("cow-uh-SOCK-ee") **disease** mostly affects children younger than five years old. Sometimes it also affects older children, preteens, and young adults. Children with Kawasaki disease can have fevers, skin rashes, bloodshot eyes, swollen lymph nodes, heart problems, and joint problems.

The illness lasts from two weeks to a few months. No one knows what causes Kawasaki disease, but it is the most common cause of acquired (the child was not born with it) heart disease in the United States.

### What are the signs of Kawasaki disease?

Children with Kawasaki disease have a fever (sometimes as high as 104° F) for five days or more not caused by another problem (such as infection). They are very tired and cranky. They may vomit, have diarrhea, and have stomach pain. Children with Kawasaki disease will also have at least four of these problems:

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

Some children, especially infants, may not have these symptoms. However, the doctor may still decide they have Kawasaki disease.

### Can Kawasaki disease be prevented?

We do not know how to prevent Kawasaki disease.

### How do they know my child has Kawasaki disease?

Your child's doctor will examine your child and ask questions about the symptoms. They will order blood and urine tests and a cardiac ultrasound (heart test).

### How is Kawasaki disease treated?

Your child will stay in the hospital, and the doctor will order a high dose of aspirin to decrease your child's fever. Aspirin also helps with rashes and joint pain. Even after the fever goes away, your child will have to take a small dose of aspirin for several weeks to decrease the chance of heart problems.

Your healthcare provider may order intravenous gamma globulin (IVIG). IVIG can help prevent heart problems that can happen with Kawasaki disease. Your child will receive this medicine through an IV (small tube that goes into the vein) for several hours. This treatment has to be given in the hospital. Some children may need steroid medicine if they do not get better along with IVIG and aspirin.

### What happens in the hospital?

In the hospital, your child will have an IV. They will also have blood and urine tests and an echocardiogram (ECHO) test. The ECHO shows pictures of the heart and blood vessels in the heart (coronary arteries CORE-oh-nair-ree ARE-ter-ease).

### Are there complications from Kawasaki disease?

Kawasaki disease causes injury to the arteries. This can cause serious problems later. The coronary arteries bring blood to the heart muscle. They can become bigger, forming coronary artery aneurysms (AN-your-is-ems). This means the disease makes the artery weak, and part of the artery bulges or "balloons."

Sometimes this is mild and does not cause any problems. This can also be a big problem and cause giant aneurysms. With giant aneurysms, there could be blood clots inside the coronary arteries. If blood clots block the enlarged coronaries, the heart muscle does not get enough oxygen. This can cause angina (chest pain) and other serious problems.

### **When can I take my child home?**

Your child may go home after the fever is gone and they have received any ordered IVIG.

### **What do I need to do for my child at home?**

- Take your child's temperature several times a day.
- Give your child the amount of aspirin the doctor instructs. Keep giving your child aspirin at home until the doctor tells you to stop.
- Keep your child home from school or day-care until they are well and feel strong enough to return.
- Make an appointment for your child with a cardiologist (heart doctor) a few weeks later. It is very important that your child sees the cardiologist. This doctor will check your child's heart to see if it is healthy again.

### **Will my child have any symptoms at home?**

- Your child's joint pain may move to the larger joints (ankles, knees) before it goes away.
- It usually takes 4–6 weeks to recover from Kawasaki disease.

### **Who else can I contact for more information?**

For more information about Kawasaki disease and parent support groups, contact the Kawasaki Disease Foundation: [kdfoundation.org](http://kdfoundation.org).

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