

# FACTSHEET

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## Kawasaki disease

### What is Kawasaki disease?

Kawasaki disease is an uncommon disease affecting mainly preschool children. Older children and younger children can also get it but less commonly. 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(s). It results in inflammation (swelling), affecting many different blood vessels all over the body.

Your child will be diagnosed with “Kawasaki disease” using their symptoms, as there is no test for the disease.

### Is it contagious?

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?

A child may have some or all of these symptoms:

- Fever of more than 3-5 days (this has to be present with some of the other symptoms). The fever is often the first noticeable symptom.
- Sore, red eyes which are not weepy.
- Red lips (which may be cracked), red tongue or mouth.
- Redness or swelling of palms and feet. Peeling of the hands and feet may occur in the second week.
- Rash.
- Swollen glands (usually on one side) 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. The doctor will exclude these before making a diagnosis of Kawasaki disease.

### 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 a paediatrician sees your child. They might be referred to 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 immunoglobulin (also called gammaglobulin) which is prepared from the antibody fraction of the blood of healthy donors. This immunoglobulin is very safe. It is given into a vein 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.

In a few children, fever lasts or reoccurs and your child will need more treatment. 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. There is a great deal of research happening to identify the cause, although the cause of 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:

Kawasaki Disease Foundation (USA)

[www.kdfoundation.org](http://www.kdfoundation.org)

#### Remember:

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