

Identifying Kawasaki Disease

Kawasaki disease is the leading cause of acquired heart disease in children.

1 Introduction

Kawasaki disease (KD), also known as mucocutaneous lymph node syndrome, is a rare heart condition that most commonly affects children under the age of 5. This condition develops suddenly and causes a high fever and inflammation of blood vessels throughout the body. KD tends to affect the coronary arteries and occurs mostly in boys. Though it is a serious disease, most children can fully recover if symptoms are caught and treated right away. If left untreated, it can lead to aneurysms, inflammation in the heart or other heart valve problems.

2 Causes

KD occurs when the immune system mistakenly attacks the blood vessel walls, causing inflammation. The exact cause is unknown, but it is thought to be the result of genetic changes or triggered by viral or bacterial infections. It is considered not to be a contagious or hereditary condition.

3 Symptoms

Symptoms of KD usually appear in 2 phases. The first can last up to two weeks, and the most common symptom is a high fever lasting five or more days. Other symptoms include:

- “Strawberry tongue” (bumps or white spots on the tongue)
- A pink rash on the belly, arms, back, legs and genital area
- Red, dry, cracked lips
- Sore throat
- Swollen hands and feet
- Swollen lymph glands

The second phase of symptoms usually begins two weeks after the fever starts. These symptoms are:

- Peeling skin on the hands and feet
- Joint pain
- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Belly pain

4 Treatments

Children with KD are typically treated in the hospital with intravenous immunoglobulin to help fight infection and prevent heart damage. High-dose aspirin may also be prescribed to treat inflammation, reduce fever and prevent blood clots.

Did you know?

About 4,000 new cases of Kawasaki Disease are diagnosed in the United States each year.

For more information on Kawasaki disease and supportive resources, please visit kidshealth.org.

References:

<https://www.cdc.gov/kawasaki/about.html>

<https://medlineplus.gov/kawasaki-disease.html>

<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/kawasaki-disease>

<https://carle.org/conditions/pediatric-conditions/kawasaki-disease>