

16. KAWASAKI DISEASE ^{1,2}

What is Kawasaki disease?

Kawasaki disease is a children's illness. It's also known as Kawasaki syndrome or mucocutaneous (mu"ko-ku-TA'ne-us) lymph node syndrome. It and acute rheumatic (roo-MAT'ik) fever are the two leading causes of acquired heart disease in children in the United States.

Who gets Kawasaki disease?

About 80 percent of the people with Kawasaki disease are under age five. Children over age eight are rarely affected. The disease occurs more often among boys (over 60 percent) and among those of Asian ancestry. But it can occur in every racial and ethnic group. Over 4,000 cases of Kawasaki disease are being diagnosed annually in the United States. Less than 1 percent of those who get it die.

What happens to those with Kawasaki disease?

The symptoms of Kawasaki disease include...

- fever
- rash
- swollen hands and feet
- irritation and redness of the whites of the eyes
- swollen lymph glands in the neck
- irritation and inflammation of the mouth, lips and throat

What Causes Kawasaki disease?

Doctors don't know what causes Kawasaki disease, but it doesn't seem to be hereditary or contagious. Scientists who've studied it think the evidence strongly suggests it's caused by an infectious agent such as a virus. It's very rare for more than one child in a family to develop Kawasaki disease. Less than 2 percent of children have another attack of Kawasaki disease.

In as many as 15 to 25 percent of the children with Kawasaki disease, the heart is affected. The coronary arteries or the heart muscle itself can be damaged.

How does Kawasaki disease affect the heart?

The coronary arteries are most often affected. Part of a coronary wall can be weakened and balloon (bulge out) in an aneurysm. A blood clot can form in this weakened area and block the artery, sometimes leading to a heart attack. The aneurysm can also burst, but this rarely happens. Other changes include inflammation of the heart muscle (myocarditis) or the sac surrounding the

heart (pericarditis). Arrhythmias (abnormal heart rhythms) or abnormal functioning of some heart valves also can occur.

Usually all the heart problems go away in five or six weeks, and there's no lasting damage. Sometimes coronary artery damage persists, however.

An arrhythmia or damaged heart muscle can be detected using an electrocardiogram (ECG). An echocardiogram (or "echo") is used to look for possible damage to the heart or coronary arteries.

How is Kawasaki disease treated?

Even though the cause of Kawasaki disease is unknown, certain medicines are known to help. Aspirin is often used to reduce fever, rash, joint inflammation and pain, and to help prevent blood clots from forming. Another medicine, intravenous gamma globulin, can decrease the risk of developing coronary artery abnormalities when given early in the illness.

¹ The following medical information has been kindly provided by CRY and is available for download in the website: [Hhttp://www.c-r-y.org.uk](http://www.c-r-y.org.uk)H.

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