

Directorate: Adults and Health

Team: Public Health

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INCREASE IN HEPATITIS (LIVER INFLAMMATION) CASES IN CHILDREN UNDER INVESTIGATION

Dear Parents,

An increase in the number of young children with liver inflammation has been identified in the UK. The likelihood of your child developing hepatitis remains extremely low. For your information we have put together some 'frequently asked questions' below on this evolving situation, based on information from the UK Health Security Agency.

Public health doctors and scientists at the UK's public health agencies are continuing to investigate a sudden surge in cases of hepatitis or liver inflammation among young children under the age of 10.

Although still very rare, 145 cases of hepatitis (liver inflammation) have been identified in children in the UK since January 2022. The usual viruses that can cause this condition (hepatitis A to E) have not been detected. Although all of these children have been hospitalised, most children seem to be recovering well. However, 10 children have received a liver transplant. No children have died in the UK.

What is hepatitis?

Hepatitis is the term used to describe inflammation of the liver. There are several different types of hepatitis. It can be caused by infectious and non-infectious agents. Some types will pass without any serious problems, while others can be long-lasting (chronic).

Hepatitis symptoms include:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• yellowing of the white part of the eyes or skin (jaundice) http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/jaundice/• dark urine• pale, grey-coloured faeces (poo)• itchy skin	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• muscle and joint pain• a high temperature• feeling and being sick• feeling unusually tired all the time• loss of appetite• tummy pain
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Do you know what is causing the increase?

The investigation so far suggests that this is linked to adenovirus infection (see below for more information). However, other potential causes are also being investigated.

There is no link to the coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccine. None of the currently confirmed cases in children under 10 are known to have been vaccinated.

Who is at risk of hepatitis?

Almost all of the cases have been seen in children under 10, with most cases aged between 2 and 5 years. Most of the children affected were previously healthy, and only a very small number of cases are linked to another case of hepatitis. This means that even if there has been a case in your family or friends, or if a case has occurred at your child's nursery or school, your child is still at low risk of developing hepatitis.

Should children stay off nursery or school if they are experiencing particular symptoms?

Children experiencing symptoms of a gastrointestinal infection including vomiting and diarrhoea should stay at home and not return to school or nursery **until 48 hours** after the symptoms have stopped. Any child who has a fever should also stay off school until they have recovered.

When to contact a doctor

- We are asking parents and guardians to be alert to the **signs of hepatitis (as listed above)** – including **jaundice** and to contact a healthcare professional if they are concerned.
- If your child develops the common mild symptoms that could be due to adenovirus infection, such as mild respiratory symptoms or diarrhoea, the chance of them developing hepatitis is extremely low.
- You do not need to contact the NHS unless your child is very sick (for example, has breathing difficulties, a prolonged high temperature or is not eating or drinking) or if he or she develops jaundice (yellowing of the eyes or skin).
- If your child is getting rapidly worse or you are worried, you should trust your instincts and contact your doctor or call the NHS on 111.

What are adenoviruses?

Adenoviruses are a family of common viruses that usually cause a range of mild illnesses and most people recover without complications. They can cause a range of symptoms, including cold-like symptoms, vomiting and diarrhoea. While they don't typically cause hepatitis, it is a known rare complication of the virus. Adenoviruses are commonly passed from person to person and by touching contaminated surfaces, as well as through the respiratory route.

Is this linked to COVID?

Information gathered through UKHSA investigations increasingly suggests that this is linked to adenovirus infection. However, they are thoroughly investigating other potential causes, including COVID-19.

What can parents do to protect their children from becoming unwell?

- We are reminding everyone about the importance of **hand washing** and parents supervising children while they do it.
- Wash your hands after you have used the toilet or changed a nappy, and before preparing food.
- Teach your child to **catch any coughs or sneezes in a tissue** and then dispose of it, or if no tissue is available then with their arm (not their hands).

Yours sincerely



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