

## **Kawasaki disease**

Kawasaki disease generally affects children under the age of five. The cause of the disease is unknown, but when it is recognized and treated right away, most children recover quickly and without complications. Most scientists think that Kawasaki disease is caused by a virus. It does not seem to be contagious since other children exposed to the diseased/infected children don't seem to acquire the disease. Less than 2 per cent of children who have had Kawasaki disease get it again. It is also known as "monocutaneous lymph gland syndrome" due to its typical clinical presentation. Children over eight years old are rarely affected. The disease occurs more frequently in boys and especially in those of Japanese and Korean origin. But it can appear in any race and racial group.

### Signs and symptoms of Kawasaki disease

Kawasaki disease generally appears in stages. The first stage tends to consist of a fever of 104 degrees F (39 degrees C), which lasts at least 5 days and can last 2 weeks. During this first stage, other common symptoms are:

- Serious reddening of the eyes
- Rash on the stomach, chest and genital area
- Mouth, lips and throat reddened, dry and cracked
- Swelling in the tongue
- Sore throat
- Swollen lymph nodes in the neck
- Swelling in the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet
- Purplish or reddish discoloration on the hands and feet

Generally, doctors can treat Kawasaki disease and prevent complications if they diagnose and treat the disease within 10 days of the appearance of the symptoms. However, in 15 to 20 per cent of children who have Kawasaki disease, the heart is affected. Kawasaki disease can cause vasculitis, which is an inflammation of the blood vessels. If the coronary arteries, which are the blood vessels that irrigate the heart with blood, are also affected, the heart could be damaged. Part of the artery wall could be weakened and create an aneurysm. A blood clot can form in this weakened area and block the artery, which sometimes leads to a heart attack. In addition, the heart muscle itself, the pericardium, which is the sac that surrounds the heart in the chest, or the heart valves can become inflamed and cause damage to the heart's structure. Arrhythmias and irregular heartbeats can occur.

In most cases, the damage to the heart is temporary and is resolved in 6 weeks.

If there is arrhythmia or a damaged heart muscle, it can be detected with an electrocardiogram. An echocardiogram (this test takes images of the heart using ultrasound) can also be used to see if there is damage in the heart muscle or valves.

#### Treatment of Kawasaki disease

The treatment works better when an early diagnosis is made. When the treatment is started within 10 days of the appearance of the symptoms, there are good chances of a full recovery without complications. Intravenous gamma globulin is administered, which contains antibodies to help fight the disease. Aspirin is also used to treat the fever and inflammation associated with the disease.