

## Acute, severe hepatitis of unknown origin in children

Issued 29 April 2022

Recent Australian media articles have cited reports from international sources (including the World Health Organization) of cases of severe hepatitis (inflammation of the liver) of unknown origin in children.

As at 21 April 2022, there were 169 known cases across 11 countries with one death and 17 children requiring a liver transplant. The children:

- Are aged 1 month to 16 years.
- Presented with symptoms including diarrhoea, nausea and abdominal pain, followed by the onset of jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes).

The World Health Organization advises that further investigations are ongoing and affected countries have initiated enhanced surveillance activities.

Hepatitis Australia has liaised with GESA (The Gastroenterological Society of Australia – the peak membership organisation for Australian healthcare professionals and researchers working in the fields of gastroenterology and hepatology) to inform this Members Brief. Separately, GESA has issued a Media Statement (see attached).

The purpose of this Members Brief is to provide member organisations with essential information to consider in the event of inquiries from the public or the media. With respect to media inquiries we suggest provision of the GESA Media Statement and referral for further information to [mediaenquiry@gesa.org.au](mailto:mediaenquiry@gesa.org.au)

### Key Messages

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- Contact your health professional without delay if you are concerned about your child's health.
- This is a very rare occurrence globally.
- Each year in Australia a small number of children present with an unexplained hepatitis, some requiring a liver transplant. GESA has not seen an unusual spike in cases here but surveillance continues.
- There is no known link to the COVID-19 vaccine. It is not known if there is a link to COVID-19.
- There is no link to hepatitis A, B, C, D or E.
- Practice thorough hand washing (including supervising children).
- Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.

### Clinical Advice to Parents & Guardians

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#### Monitoring Symptoms

GESA's advice is to be alert to the symptoms of acute hepatitis and contact a healthcare professional without delay if there are concerns about a child's health.

- Symptoms may include nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, loss of appetite or fever (above 38 degrees).

- Patients might develop yellow colouring of the skin and eyes (called 'jaundice'), along with dark urine and pale-coloured faeces (poo).

## For Clinical Advice

For clinical advice, contact a Health Professional:

1. Speak to a nurse by calling  
in Victoria 'Nurse on Call' on 1300 60 60 24  
in Queensland '13HEALTH' (13 432 584)  
in all other states 'Healthdirect' on 1800 022 222.
2. Call your General Practice to speak with a GP or Practice Nurse.
3. For emergencies present to a local hospital Emergency Department or call an ambulance.

## Additional Information

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### References

- World Health Organization (WHO) Disease Outbreak News. *Multi-Country – Acute, severe hepatitis of unknown origin in children* (23 April 2022) <https://www.who.int/emergencies/disease-outbreak-news/item/2022-DON376>
- UK Health. *Guidance: Increase in acute hepatitis cases of unknown aetiology in children* (8 April 2022) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hepatitis-increase-in-acute-cases-of-unknown-aetiology-in-children/increase-in-acute-hepatitis-cases-of-unknown-aetiology-in-children>

### Media Examples

Examples of Australian media articles (26 April 2022):

- ABC: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-04-26/new-hepatitis-strain-in-children-explainer/101015412>
- MSN: <https://www.msn.com/en-au/news/newslondon/what-is-hepatitis-and-what-are-the-symptoms-as-parents-are-warned-to-check-children/ar-AAVYM7Y>
- MSN: <https://www.msn.com/en-au/health/medical/hepatitis-symptoms-in-children-the-signs-to-look-for/ar-AAWtDlo>