

HEALTH NEWS

WHO Says at Least 650 Children Have Developed Mysterious Hepatitis




Written by [George Citroner](#) — Updated on May 27, 2022



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- **At least 216 cases have been detected in the U.S. and Puerto Rico.**
- **At least 650 cases of the condition have been detected worldwide.**
- **Experts are not sure what is causing these hepatitis cases but suspect it may be related to an adenovirus.**

New [data](#)  released by the World Health Organization (WHO) has revealed that hundreds of children have developed mysterious hepatitis symptoms in recent months.

The WHO reported that at least 38 of the children ended up needing liver transplants, and nine had died due to the symptoms of hepatitis.

The U.K. has reported the highest number of cases with 222. The U.S. has reported 216 suspected cases. Most children affected by the condition were under the age of five.


The cause of the mysterious hepatitis remains unknown, although officials suspect a type of virus called an adenovirus may be involved. At least 180 children with hepatitis were tested for adenovirus, and 110 tested positive.

Of the children tested for adenovirus in the U.K., about 75 percent tested positive. Officials are also concerned that exposure to COVID-19 could be linked to the condition, but of 188 children given PCR tests for COVID-19 only 12 percent tested positive.

Officials say it's possible that a coinfection with COVID-19 or a previous COVID-19 infection could be related to these cases, but more investigation is needed.



Cases date back to 2021

Dr. Jay Butler, CDC's deputy director for infectious diseases, [said](#)  these cases date to October 2021.

"Fifteen days ago, CDC issued a nationwide health alert to notify clinicians and public health authorities about an investigation involving nine children in Alabama identified between October of 2021 and February of 2022 with hepatitis or inflammation of the liver and adenovirus infection," said Butler.

All nine children in Alabama tested positive for adenovirus, a common virus that typically causes mild cold or flu-like symptoms or stomach and intestinal problems. They came from different areas in the state.

"We're casting a broad net to increase our understanding," he said. "As we learn more, we'll share additional information and updates."

Regarding any role COVID-19 may play in these, Butler added, "we are not aware of cases that are occurring in kids that have documented COVID-19. But it's a question that I think is still unanswered."

Lack of identifiable cause is ‘concerning’

[Michelle M. Kelly](#), PhD, Associate Professor, and Research Fellow at the University of Rhode Island, College of Nursing at Villanova University, said the lack of identifiable cause for these cases is “concerning.”

Kelly also pointed out that the number of hepatitis cases in children in the U.S. does not appear to have risen.

“While the situation warrants attention, scientific exploration, and tracking, the overall numbers in the U.S. of children with hepatitis, according to the CDC, has not increased over previous years,” said Kelly.

However, Kelly added that other countries with universal medical records and better healthcare tracing had found increased numbers in children less than five years of age.



Three causes of hepatitis

[Ilhan Shapiro](#), MD, a pediatrician with [AltaMed Health Services](#), told Healthline it’s important for parents to reach out to their pediatrician if they are concerned their child could have signs of hepatitis.

“When we start seeing these clusters of infection, and not only that, but seeing a high rate of kids ending up needing a liver transplant in a very short period of time, that’s worrisome,” Shapiro said.

Hepatitis refers to the liver being inflamed and is most commonly caused by medications, viruses, or exposure to certain chemicals, according to Shapiro.

Once the liver is affected, it loses its ability to clear certain substances from the blood, including a blood product called [bilirubin](#).

Without bilirubin, a child can become jaundiced, resulting in a yellowish color in their skin and eyes.

“When the liver stops working, we start accumulating all these chemicals

in our bodies that we usually flush away,” said Shapiro. “The child will start having a yellow color in their skin and the white part of the eyes – That’s one of the most common things that we can see when we have it.”

Other symptoms include dark urine and stools becoming white, he said.

What parents should know

Shapiro said parents who suspect their child has hepatitis should be ready to provide certain information to healthcare providers.

“They can help us out by knowing if they [the children] have all their vaccines up to date,” he said. He pointed out there are vaccines that protect against the hepatitis A virus and hepatitis B virus. Parents should let their physicians know if their child has been vaccinated against either of those viruses.



Shapiro also recommended making a “mental note” of where your child was and if anybody was sick around them.

“Because that can help figuring out if other people are getting sick or not,” he said.

While what’s causing these cases is still a mystery, experts are trying to pin down a definitive cause.

“We just don’t know,” said Shapiro. “The most common causes are chemicals, medications, and viruses, then we need to figure out if it was something that they were consuming, if it was medication that they all were using, or is this a virus or other viruses that we don’t suspect yet, to figure out which it is.”

He said his best advice is to report anything that might be relevant, “that way we’ll have more information.”

Shapiro also explained that the liver has a remarkable ability to recover from injury.

“The beautiful part about the liver,” he said. “Is if we can help the liver a little bit, it usually recovers. It’s a very resilient organ.”

The bottom line

The WHO has announced new data on the mysterious hepatitis cases affecting children. They found at least 650 potential cases of hepatitis affecting children nationwide.

Experts say that there are few possible causes for this outbreak, and information gathering should help find which is responsible.

They also say that parents who suspect their child has hepatitis should be ready to provide information, including vaccine history, where the child was, and with whom they had contact.



How we reviewed this article:

HISTORY

Our experts continually monitor the health and wellness space, and we update our articles when new information becomes available.

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