



Media Advisory

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Joint investigation into reports of eight illnesses from four WA counties: Children admitted to Seattle Children's Hospital

Media briefing today at 4:00 p.m.
1610 NE 150th St, Shoreline, WA 98155

Seattle WA: The Washington State Department of Health is leading a joint investigation into reports of eight children who were admitted to Seattle Children's Hospital with acute neurologic illnesses. As part of our work to understand their symptoms, we are investigating the possibility of a condition known as [acute flaccid myelitis](#) (AFM). Public Health Seattle & King County, Seattle Children's Hospital, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are working with the Department of Health on the investigation. At this time, there are no confirmed cases of AFM.

AFM is a rare condition that can be caused by many different things; it affects the nervous system, specifically the spinal cord. Symptoms typically include sudden weakness in one or more arms or legs, along with loss of muscle tone and decreased or absent reflexes.

The exact cause of AFM is unknown. Many viruses and germs are linked to AFM, including common germs that can cause colds and sore throats, and respiratory infections. It can also be caused by poliovirus and non-polio enteroviruses, mosquito-borne viruses (such as West Nile Virus or Zika virus) and autoimmune conditions.

The eight children were admitted to the hospital with a range of types and severity of symptoms, but all had a loss of strength or movement in one or more arms or legs. The children are from four counties [King County - 3 children, Pierce County - 1 child, Franklin County- 2 children, and Whatcom County - 2 children]. The children range in age from 3 to 14 years. Three of the eight cases are currently hospitalized at Seattle Children's Hospital and five have been

released. Out of respect for patient privacy, no further information about specific patient cases can be provided.

“At Seattle Children’s, patient safety is our top priority and parents should rest assured that it is safe to bring their children to the hospital,” said Dr. Mark Del Beccaro, chief medical officer at Seattle Children’s Hospital. “We are following our standard infection control protocols, including putting patients with symptoms of active respiratory infections in isolation so they do not have contact with any other patients.”

Public Health Seattle & King County, the DOH and the CDC are in the process of further evaluating each case and conducting tests to determine if the patients meet the case definition for AFM, and if an underlying cause can be identified. However, the cause of any individual case of AFM can be hard to determine, and often, no cause is found. The CDC makes the final determination regarding whether these are confirmed cases of AFM or not.

“At this point there isn’t evidence that would point to a single source of illness among these cases,” said Dr. Scott Lindquist, state infectious disease epidemiologist at the Department of Health. “However, this investigation is just getting underway and we’re looking at all possibilities as we try to understand what might have contributed to these illnesses.”

There were no cases of AFM reported in Washington State last year, in 2014 there were two. There have been more than 50 cases of AFM in 24 states across the U.S. so far this year. For more [information on AFM](#), visit the CDC website. A fact sheet about this investigation is on the Department of Health’s website.

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