

Health Facts

Emergency Department

Henoch-Schonlein Purpura (HSP)

What is HSP?

HSP is a type of vasculitis – an inflammation of the small blood vessels. It is similar to an allergic reaction. The body areas most commonly affected are the small blood vessels, joints, gastrointestinal system (stomach and bowel) and occasionally the kidneys. In very rare circumstances the brain can be affected.

What causes HSP?

- The exact cause of HSP is unknown.
- It develops following a respiratory illness (i.e. cold or flu).
- Viral or bacterial illnesses have been known to cause HSP, but are less common. After an infection an allergic type response of the immune system occurs resulting in the symptoms below.
- HSP is more common in boys than girls.
- HSP is seen more often in spring and autumn.

Signs and symptoms

- Skin rash: looks like small bruises or small reddish-purple spots occurring mainly on the legs and buttocks and sometimes elsewhere.
- Abdominal pain
- Pain in the joints such as the knees and ankles, which is usually short-term.
- Swelling: may be seen on the hands and feet and the scrotum in boys.
- Blood in the stools (poo) or urine: this is caused by the blood vessels in the bowel and kidneys becoming inflamed.

Treatment

- Each child is treated according to his or her symptoms.
- Pain relief is usually all your child will require. If the symptoms are severe or prolonged, steroids may be used to help control the inflammation process.
- Your child's urine may be tested for signs of kidney inflammation.
- HSP usually resolves after four to six weeks.
- HSP can re-occur in half of affected children within 12 months.
- In most cases no long-term effects are associated with HSP.

Discharge instructions

You will be discharged with advice given by your doctor. It is likely your child will be asked to return to the doctor for regular blood pressure and follow-up urine checks. If at any stage your child redevelops symptoms, develops new symptoms or has worsening symptoms, make an appointment with your GP or take your child to the nearest emergency department.