

Technical Note

This technical note follows the previous reports regarding the event of acute, severe hepatitis of unknown origin in children disseminated by the Pan American Health Organization / World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) on 23 April 2022 (two reports)¹, 25 April 2022², and 29 April 2022³.

This event was first reported by the United Kingdom International Health Regulations (IHR) National Focal Point on 5 April 2022, referring to 10 cases of severe acute hepatitis of unknown etiology in previously healthy young children (ages ranging from 11 months to 5 years old) in Scotland. To date, 348 probable cases have been reported in 21 countries, with 26 children requiring liver transplantation. Fifteen countries have reported 5 or fewer cases.

The epidemiological, laboratory, and clinical information currently available to WHO regarding this event remains limited. To date, no etiological agent has been identified. Adenovirus has been detected in blood or plasma samples for many of the cases, but in low viral loads. Adenovirus has not yet been identified in the liver tissue samples analyzed and therefore, could be a coincidental rather than a causal factor.

The Organization, together with the affected countries, are collecting additional data and conducting various studies. In the coming weeks, it is expected there will be more evidence to determine the etiology and based on this, issue recommendations to further define the appropriate prevention, treatment, and control actions. At this stage, focusing on high-quality investigations of cases for which extensive clinical, epidemiological, environmental, and laboratory information has been collected and for which other causes have been ruled out is the best use of resources. For these reasons, PAHO/WHO is not currently recommending universal surveillance. However, this recommendation may change as additional information becomes available and/or the etiological agent is determined.

PAHO/WHO recommends Member States identify and investigate potential cases meeting the current WHO working case definition¹. Furthermore, in accordance with Article 8 of the International Health Regulations (2005), States Parties may keep WHO advised on the situation, including epidemiological information and risk factors of cases that have been identified, through the IHR National Focal Point communication channels.

¹ WHO. Multi-Country – Acute, severe hepatitis of unknown origin in children. Disease Outbreak News. 23 April 2022. Available at: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/disease-outbreak-news/item/2022-DON376>.

² WHO. Event Information Site for IHR National Focal Points (EIS). Multi-Country – Acute, severe hepatitis of unknown origin in children. 25 April 2022.

³ PAHO/WHO. Epidemiological Alert: Acute, severe hepatitis of unknown origin in children. 29 April 2022. Available at: <https://www.paho.org/en/documents/epidemiological-alert-acute-severe-hepatitis-unknown-origin-children-29-april-2022>.