

Reactive lymphadenopathy

This leaflet offers more information about reactive lymphadenopathy in children and young people. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to the staff member in charge of your care.

What is reactive lymphadenopathy and why has my child got it?

Reactive lymphadenopathy is when lymph glands respond to infection by becoming swollen.

It often happens in children as their immunity is still developing.

Lymph glands or nodes are small nodules which help the body fight infection. They tend to become bigger when they are active. Swollen lymph glands are most easy to find at the back the mouth (the tonsils), in the neck, armpits and groin. There are more all over the body. Sometimes you can feel or see the enlarged glands, which may be painful.

Children can seem to be constantly fighting infections. An average child in the UK can have four to six viral infections in one winter, with one illness sometimes running into the next. As viral infections usually affect the head, throat and chest so the lymph glands in the neck and throat can be swollen for a long time.

Up to 50% of children will have swollen glands sometimes. Some children have colds and painful glands more often than others, normally because they are close to more germs e.g. they have just started school or nursery.

What are the signs and symptoms?

You or your child may notice persistent swelling e.g. in the lymph glands in the neck or throat, often starting during a cough or cold. The cold may get better but the gland stay swollen.

Sometimes the gland itself can get infected and become red, hot and tender and your child may have a fever. Your child should see a doctor if this happens as an abscess may have formed.

Rarely, a lymph gland gets very big slowly, over several weeks. If it isn't painful and is steadily growing, the gland may be infected by a less common germ or be big for another reason. If this happens, or if your child loses weight, sweats a lot at night, or seems unwell, see your doctor.

Does my child need any tests to confirm the diagnosis?

Your doctor will probably do some blood tests to rule out certain infections or other causes of your child's swollen lymph glands.

Your child may also have a chest x-ray or an ultrasound scan, although these are often not needed.

What treatments are available?

In simple reactive lymphadenopathy there is no specific treatment. The gland will shrink on its own, usually in the warmer summer months. It may go up again when your child has another cough or cold and then settle back down. In most cases the cause of infection will be a virus so antibiotics are of no use and will not be prescribed.

If the doctor feels your child has developed an infection in the gland itself they may prescribe antibiotics. If there is an abscess then a small operation may be needed, but this is unusual.

What happens if my child does not get treatment?

Most children will have no complications and the swelling will eventually go down on its own. The glands may stay swollen for several months, but should not keep growing steadily.

Is there anything I can do to help my child?

Nothing will help the gland go down quicker but you should watch out for any signs of infection, continued growth of the gland or change in your child and see your GP if you are worried.

Useful sources of information

<http://www.patient.co.uk/health/swollen-lymph-glands>

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about reactive lymphadenopathy, please contact the paediatric medicine secretaries on 020 8725 3648 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 4.30pm), giving the name of the doctor you saw, if possible. Out of hours, please leave a voice message.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing (near the lift foyer).

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111

