



Kawasaki Disease Foundation
CARING FOR PRECIOUS HEARTS

News Release

For immediate release

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Awareness & Prompt Treatment of Little-Known Disease Saves Lives - KD Foundation Declares Jan. 26 “Kawasaki Disease Awareness Day”

Early Diagnosis of KD is Critical, But Illness May Be Missed

(New York, NY. December 10, 2010.) A group of dedicated parents and former patients is seeking to raise awareness of a mysterious illness that comes on suddenly, usually strikes the very young and causes a host of unusual symptoms that can make a child miserable. Kawasaki Disease (KD) is a little-known illness that can lead to permanent heart damage or even take a young life if not diagnosed and treated in a timely manner.

Awareness of KD symptoms on the part of parents, prompt diagnosis and early treatment can save lives and prevent future health problems. To that end, the Kawasaki Disease Foundation has declared January 26, 2011 the **first annual National Kawasaki Disease Awareness Day**.

“We chose this date because on January 26, 1961, Dr. Tomisaku Kawasaki of Japan had his ‘aha’ moment when he saw his second patient with the telltale signs of what would later be named Kawasaki Disease,” said Greg Chin, president of the Kawasaki Disease Foundation. “Fifty years later, we know that KD is the No.1 cause of acquired heart disease in children. But early diagnosis and prompt treatment can prevent the complications of Kawasaki Disease and save lives. That’s why we want parents to know and recognize the signs of KD and take their child to the doctor immediately if he or she has persistent fever and other symptoms,” said Mr. Chin, whose son had the disease, but fully recovered.

Kawasaki Disease involves an inflammation of blood vessels throughout the body. More than 80 percent of patients are **under age five**, although older children and teenagers can also get KD. The hallmark of the disease is a fever that lasts for several days. Other early signs include a rash (often worse in the groin area);



bloodshot eyes, without drainage or crusting; bright red, swollen, cracked lips; “strawberry tongue”, which appears with shiny bright red spots after the top coating sloughs off; swollen hands and feet; redness of the palms and soles of the feet; and swollen lymph nodes in the neck. Most children are extremely irritable.

“Unfortunately, untreated Kawasaki Disease can cause serious problems later in life.”

according to Jane C. Burns, MD, director of the Kawasaki Disease Research Center at Rady Children’s Hospital and the University of California San Diego. The Research Center began an adult Kawasaki Disease study in 2009 to address a surprising number of reported cases of young adults suffering heart attacks in their early twenties and thirties as a result of missed or untreated KD. The disease is most often misdiagnosed or overlooked in infants and teenagers.

Prompt diagnosis and timely treatment are important to prevent complications affecting the heart arteries, according to Dr. Burns. Children are hospitalized and receive an intravenous treatment called gamma globulin, a product containing antibodies that comes from donor blood. The goal is provide the treatment within 10 days of developing KD.

National Kawasaki Disease Awareness Day is being promoted with a grassroots effort of parent support groups for KD patients and their families in cities throughout the United States. Leaders are spreading the word via a Facebook campaign and the KD Foundation web site, and they are asking Congress to approve an official resolution to recognize the date.

Kate Davila, 33, is among those involved in raising awareness. She has survived three minor heart attacks since being diagnosed with Kawasaki Disease at age 15. She was not diagnosed immediately and wasn’t treated with gamma globulin until after 10 days of developing the disease.

“In the beginning, my doctors weren't sure what I had, but I spent a week out of school, going to the doctor about three times during that week,” she recalls. “I was admitted to the ER for dehydration, and as I was given my IV, I started to get sicker. They tested me for meningitis and a bunch of other things. They finally admitted me and put me in isolation, as they still didn't know what I had. My pediatrician went home and looked through his medical books with my symptoms and finally came up with the diagnosis of KD.”

Ms. Davila was hospitalized, treated with gamma globulin and started to feel better.



“Being sick with KD prior to hospitalization was something I'll never forget. I remember not being able to lift my head without placing my hand behind it because I was in so much pain.”

More than 5,500 children were hospitalized in the United States for KD in 2006, the most recent year for which statistics were available from the Centers for Disease Control. But the number is probably higher, according to Dr. Burns, because it does not include all hospitals nationwide. Children of all races and ethnicities are affected. Without treatment, about 25 percent of children develop heart disease involving the coronary arteries.

Despite several years of research, the cause of KD remains a mystery. At the moment, there is no specific test, such as a blood test or throat culture, to diagnose KD. The doctor makes the diagnosis based on the child's signs and symptoms and supportive laboratory tests showing inflammation.

In connection with Kawasaki Disease Awareness Day, the KD Foundation has designed a poster depicting the signs and symptoms of the illness. It is available to doctors' offices, hospitals and clinics upon request. A printable version is also available on the foundation web site.

A wealth of information about Kawasaki Disease, including an information packet and newsletter, is available at www.kdfoundation.org.

ABOUT THE KAWASAKI DISEASE FOUNDATION - The Kawasaki Disease Foundation is a national nonprofit organization of parents, patients, and medical professionals dedicated to advancing Kawasaki Disease issues. The Foundation focuses on awareness, support, and research in the area of Kawasaki Disease. The Foundation promotes early detection and treatment of Kawasaki Disease, and provides information and support for families through a nationwide telephone and e-mail help network. For more information, visit: www.kdfoundation.org.