

When Your Child has Pediatric Delirium

What is pediatric delirium?

Pediatric delirium is a change in your child's mental state. It happens when they're very sick.

It makes your child very confused and changes how they think and act. These changes are sudden and can shift quickly in short periods of time.

These changes do not often last long. As your child heals from their illness, the delirium should also get better.

What does it look like?

Your child may:

- find it hard to pay attention or remember things
- sleep too much or not enough
- see or hear things that others don't
- be confused
- be harder to soothe
- not recognize you or know where they are
- have strong moods that can change quickly.

Your child's signs of delirium may come and go. They may be worse at night.

Why does my child have it?

There are many things that can cause delirium in children, including:

- illness or infection
- changes in how they sleep
- a head injury
- when there's not enough oxygen to the brain.

Many times, more than one thing causes delirium.

Also some medicine can add to their confusion. If this happens, we'll find other ways to treat their illness.

It's common for children in the ICU to have delirium. When they get medical care 24 hours a day, it can be hard to know when to be awake and when to sleep. This can put extra stress on the brain.

How can I help my child?

- Be calm. Talk in clear, short sentences. Ask one simple question at a time.
- Bring in toys, pictures, or other items from home.
- Keep their room light during the day. Keep the room dark and quiet at night.
- Put up a clock and calendar where they can see it.
- Play calming music at their bedside.
- If your child is confused, don't argue with them. Bring their attention to real events and people.
- Remind your child where they are, what time of day it is, and what is happening.
- If needed, give them their hearing aids and glasses.

What should I tell my child's health care team?

Tell us:

- ways that often help calm your child
- how your child lets you know how they feel and what they need. If they use a communication device, let us know.

How will it go away?

As your child heals from their illness, the delirium should also get better.

When they start to feel less confused, your child will start to be more awake and active during the day and sleep at night.

To help them heal, your child may need different kinds of help. Your child's health care team may include a:

- physical or occupational therapist
- child life specialist
- speech therapist
- mental health provider.

A physical therapist, occupational therapist, or a child life specialist can help your child be more active during the day.

A mental health provider can talk to you and give your child medicine for a short time while they heal, if needed.

What should I do after their delirium is gone?

You should tell their primary provider that they had delirium. They can help as your child continues to heal from their illness.

If your child is sick in the future, tell their provider they had delirium in the past. It will help with their care.

You should also let their school and teachers know they had delirium.

What may happen after?

Once you're home from the hospital, you may notice changes in how your child thinks or feels.

Trouble thinking and focusing

Some children find it hard to focus or pay attention. It may be hard for your child to go back to school. They may:

- not want to go to school
- do poorly in school
- be unable to stay focused on one thing.
- get in trouble.

To help, talk to your child's teacher and school. Ask them to let you know if your child has a hard time with their school work. They may have ideas that can help.

If you have concerns, you can also talk to your child's provider.

There may be tests that can be done by their school or provider to help understand what's going on.

Mood and mental health changes

Some children have anxiety, depression, or post-traumatic stress symptoms. Pay attention to how they act.

Your child may:

- feel sad or mad
- feel scared or worry a lot
- have trouble with sleep
- have bad dreams
- be afraid of loud noises
- have confused memories.

If you have concerns, talk your child's provider. They may suggest your child meet with a mental health provider.