
What is lupus?

Systemic lupus erythematosus (also called SLE or lupus) is an autoimmune disease that can affect many different parts of the body.

- The immune system normally fights off germs and diseases in the body. An **autoimmune disease** happens when the body's immune system attacks a person's own body.
- Lupus can affect different parts of the body in different people. This may include the skin, joints, kidneys, blood cells, liver, lungs, heart and/or brain.
- Lupus is a **chronic disease**. This means your child will need continued monitoring and treatment over time.

What is lupus nephritis?

- The kidneys filter the blood, helping to remove harmful substances from the body, keep electrolytes (such as sodium and potassium) in normal ranges, and get rid of extra fluid.
- In some children with lupus, the immune system attacks the kidneys and can cause them to not work as well as they should.
- Inflammation of the kidneys is called nephritis. It is called lupus nephritis when the inflammation is from lupus.

What are the possible symptoms of lupus nephritis?

Your child may have 1 or more of these:

- Weight gain
- Swelling (most often in the feet and ankles)
- Urine that has bubbles or looks like foam
- Blood in the urine
- Urinating more or less than normal
- Headaches
- High blood pressure

What tests could my child have?

Your child may have 1 or more of these tests:

- **Blood tests (labs)** to check how well the kidneys are working.
- **Urine tests** to look for blood and protein in the urine.
- **Kidney ultrasound** to get pictures of the kidneys and bladder using sound waves.
- **Kidney biopsy** to remove a small piece of tissue from the kidney. Your child will be asleep for this test. A pathologist then looks at the tissue under a microscope. A biopsy lets the care team know if lupus nephritis is damaging the kidneys. It also tells us if the lupus nephritis is mild or severe.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

Lupus nephritis, continued

What is the treatment?

A nephrologist (kidney doctor) will guide your child's treatment. The nephrologist may work with other doctors, such as a rheumatologist (autoimmune disease doctor), to choose the best care plan for your child.

Your child may need medicines to:

- Stop lupus from attacking and harming the kidneys.
- Control high blood pressure.
- Get rid of extra fluid in the body.

Your child may also need to change their diet. This often includes eating foods with less salt. Talk with the doctor and nutritionist about what foods and drinks your child should avoid.

If your child has severe (very bad) kidney damage from lupus, they may need:

- Dialysis to remove waste from the blood with a machine.
- A kidney transplant.

When should I call the doctor?

Call the doctor **right away** if your child has any of these:

- Sudden changes in weight
- Swelling in any part of the body
- Blood in the urine
- Urinating less than normal
- Fever (temperature of 100.4°F or higher)
- Nausea or vomiting that does not go away
- Extreme tiredness or weakness
- Headaches that are severe or do not go away with medicine

Call 911 or take your child to the nearest emergency department (ED) if you have an urgent concern about how your child looks or feels.

Where can I learn more?

Visit the Lupus Foundation of America website at [lupus.org/resources/how-lupus-affects-the-renal-kidney-system](https://www.lupus.org/resources/how-lupus-affects-the-renal-kidney-system) to learn more.

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This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of your child.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.