

Paediatric Emergencies in Primary Care

Introduction

Acute illness in children is a very common reason for consultation in Primary Care, but most of these children will not become seriously ill. One study of over 6,000 acutely unwell children presenting to Primary Care in the UK showed that 2.1% were admitted to hospital within 7 days of their initial presentation, and only 0.3% overall were subsequently found to have serious illness¹. However, children are often seen in Primary Care at an early stage in their illness, when it can be difficult to assess whether there is serious underlying pathology. Important factors in deciding when hospital admission is required, and when careful safety-netting is more appropriate, include not just clinical factors but the broader social setting, carer confidence and competence, and the support network available to them².

Many children who do have life-threatening illnesses will be taken directly to hospital, either by ambulance or by their caregivers, but there are still occasions when Primary Care practitioners are called upon to assess and manage these children. This may be due to a rural setting, rapid deterioration in a child's condition, or the severity of the illness going unrecognised by parents/carers or health professionals in its earlier stages.

This module explores three common Paediatric presentations with the potential to develop into life-threatening illnesses:

- first seizure accompanied by fever
- croup and the differential diagnosis of upper airways obstruction
- the unwell neonate and young infant (< 3 months old)

Module aims:

After completing this module, you should be able to:

- Assess a child with a febrile convulsion, be aware of emergency treatment options, and know when to refer to hospital
- Assess the severity of upper airways obstruction, diagnose croup and be aware of criteria for hospital admission
- Be aware of the signs of significant illness in a neonate/young infant and know the common underlying causes