

UNDERSTANDING PANDAS - PAEDIATRIC AUTOIMMUNE NEUROPSYCHIATRIC DISORDER ASSOCIATED WITH STREPTOCOCCAL INFECTIONS

PANDAS (Paediatric Autoimmune Neuropsychiatric Disorder Associated with Streptococcal Infections) is a medical condition. It affects children's physical and mental health via a misdirected immune and/or neuroinflammatory response in the wake of a streptococcus (strep) infection. Some common forms of strep infections include scarlet fever, strep throat and some types of tonsillitis.

PANDAS typically appears between the ages of 3 and 13, but symptoms do not necessarily remit at the age of 16 or beyond. The symptoms often come and go, with periods of worsening symptoms known in layperson's terms as a flare.

HOW CAN THE CONDITIONS PRESENT/SIGNS TO LOOK OUT FOR

Children with PANDAS may suddenly struggle in school showing a wide range of symptoms including:

- Obsessive thoughts and compulsions
- Tics
- Anxiety including separation anxiety
- Regressive behaviours
- Changes in mood or personality
- sleep problems
- Restricted eating or severely restricted food intake
- Sensory issues

- Decline in the quality of schoolwork
- Handwriting changes

These symptoms can change over time and can be harder to spot in very young children or those with other conditions and/or neurodivergence. Some children can develop special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) following the onset of the condition, without any prior evidence of needs.

Not all children will exhibit all of the symptoms, and other causes, conditions and/or experiencing difficult events can sometimes result in similar symptoms. PANDAS is a diagnosis of exclusion which means that any other causes need to be medically ruled out first.

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INITIAL STEPS IF YOU THINK A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON IN YOUR SETTINGS SHOWS SIGN OF THE CONDITIONS

If you suspect a child in your school may have PANDAS, keep a detailed log of symptoms and communicate with parent/caregivers and other professionals to gather their observations and assessments. It is not unusual for children with PANDAS to present differently at home and at school. Diagnosis must be made by a medical professional, and early detection is important to avoid potential longer-term impacts.

Consider supporting the parents/carers with a letter to take to the GP that could include:

- The full scope and pattern of symptoms/needs in school with the timing of onset

- Support/accommodations put in place, and response of the child or young person
- Summary of the child or young person's functioning in school before the reported onset of symptoms across the different areas of functioning.
- Highlighting the level of concern and offering to provide any further information as required

It is currently challenging for children to access a diagnosis of PANDAS on the NHS as levels of awareness about the conditions are still low. If required, further resources, support and information for the GP including an online training module can be accessed [here](#).

KEY RESOURCES

For more medical and general information please go to the [PANS PANDAS UK website](#).

For education resources, including the option for schools to attend online Teacher or Educational Psychology training please visit [here](#).

A wealth of education resources are also available on the PANS and PANDAS [padlet](#).