



NHS

Great Ormond Street
Hospital for Children
NHS Foundation Trust

All about acute flaccid myelitis or AFM (Easy Read)



Your spinal cord runs down your back and send messages to and from the brain. Nerves run off the spinal cord to reach every part of your body.



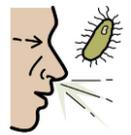
Sometimes, your spinal cord can be damaged, which means that areas of your body like your arms and legs can be weak and floppy.



In AFM, this happens to a small number of children after they have had a viral infection. We're not really sure why this happens.



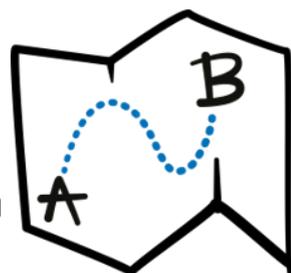
The first sign of AFM is a sudden weakness in your arm or leg. It may also be numb or tingling.



This can happen up to 2 weeks after you have had a viral infection. The types of infection vary but are usually a chest infection or tummy bug.



The doctor will ask lots of questions to find out more. They will want to know when the weakness started and if you have recently had a viral infection.





They will also ask you to do certain things, like walk, stand up from sitting or raise your arms above your head. They will look at how easy or hard this is for you.



You will also need a lumbar puncture. This lets the doctors take a tiny sample of fluid from around your spinal cord. This can be uncomfortable but the doctors will be as quick as they can.



You will also have an MRI scan of your spine. You may need to have an anaesthetic for this so you can keep really still. An MRI scan is noisy so you will have headphones to wear. You can watch a video or your favourite film while it happens



You will usually have EMG and NCS tests – these check how messages travel to and from your brain and spinal cord from your arms and legs.



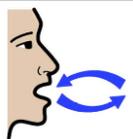
When the doctors have worked out you have AFM, they will start treatment. This will be different for everyone but could include:



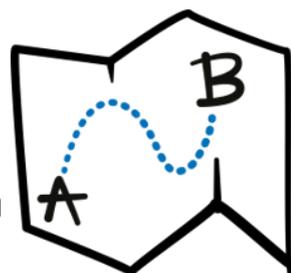
Infusions of IVIG medicine or steroid medicine or both. These are given through a cannula in the back of your hand or arm.



Plasma exchange is a bit like kidney dialysis but the machine cleans your blood to replace the straw coloured liquid that holds your blood cells.



A very small number of children may need help with their breathing. They may have to go to intensive care for a while.





Physiotherapy is important to keep your muscles are strong as possible. You will have sessions with a physio and exercises to do in between.



After you have recovered from AFM, you might still have weak muscles in your arm or leg. You will need to carry on with physio for a while.



An occupational therapist (OT) can help you to find ways of doing things, even if your arm or leg is weak. You may have to learn new ways of doing things or use aids to help you.



Your arm or leg may be sore for a while afterwards. You can ask for help from the Pain team to help you find ways of managing it.



It may help to see a psychologist to work with you to manage your feelings and find ways of coping with everyday life.



Most children carry on having muscle weakness but with help can do most day to day activities, go to school and play sport.



Please ask us if you have any questions.

