

# Juvenile Dermatomyositis

## What Is Juvenile Dermatomyositis?

Juvenile dermatomyositis (JDM) is an autoimmune disorder that affects blood supply to muscles, and causes muscle inflammation. If untreated, this inflammation can lead to muscle deterioration, muscle weakness and joint problems.

## What Causes Juvenile Dermatomyositis?

No one knows exactly what causes dermatomyositis in children. But many researchers believe that genetics, the immune system and environmental influences all play a role.

Juvenile dermatomyositis affects roughly 3,000 to 5,000 children in the U.S. Most cases of the condition occur in children ages 5 to 10.

## Juvenile Dermatomyositis Symptoms and Effects

The earliest sign of juvenile dermatomyositis is the gradual development of a skin rash. The rash might appear as a reddish-purple patch, or as a purple rash around the eyelids and cheeks.

Some children start experiencing muscle weakness at the same time as they develop the dermatomyositis rash. Other kids might not notice muscle weakness until days, weeks or even months after the initial rash. A child's weakest muscles are typically those closest to the torso—for example, neck, shoulders, stomach, back and hips.

Common symptoms of juvenile dermatomyositis include:

- Fever ranging from 101 to 104 degrees.
- Hardened lumps or sheets of calcium (calcinosis) under the skin.
- Hoarse or weak-sounding voice.
- Muscle pain.
- Poor appetite.
- Stomach problems.
- Tiredness.
- Trouble lifting the head.
- Trouble swallowing.
- Weight loss.

Less common symptoms of juvenile dermatomyositis include:

- **Vasculitic ulcers:** These open sores in the skin or gastrointestinal tract result from inflamed blood vessels. They can extend deep into tissues, and can be very painful.
- **Contractures:** Sometimes juvenile dermatomyositis causes joint muscles to shorten (contract). Shortened muscles, in turn, lead to limited joint movement.

## Juvenile Dermatomyositis Treatment and Diagnosis

Your child might undergo the following tests to confirm a dermatomyositis diagnosis or check for other conditions:

- **Laboratory tests:** Laboratory work—such as blood tests—looks for signs of inflammation, including antibodies and muscle enzymes.
- **Electromyography (EMG):** An **EMG** measures nerve or muscle damage.
- **Muscle biopsy:** This test involves removing a small piece of muscle and examining it for microscopic signs of inflammation and vascular disruption.
- **MRI: MRIs** produce detailed images of inflamed muscle and blood vessels.

There is no single cure for juvenile dermatomyositis. But medicine, **physical therapy**, and regular exercise can help children who have JDM live typical, active lives. Treatment plans vary depending on the symptoms and complications dermatomyositis causes in each child.

If your child has dermatomyositis, treatment options might include:

### Medicines

Your child might need to take prescribed corticosteroids, methotrexate, or other anti-inflammatory medicines to treat inflammation caused by juvenile dermatomyositis. Hydroxychloroquine is a prescribed medicine to treat skin rash.

### Physical and Occupational Therapy

Your child might need **physical therapy** and **occupational therapy** to improve muscle function and strength.

### Sunscreen

Make sure your child uses sunscreen regularly, to prevent further irritation or skin damage.

## Nutrition

Help your child maintain a balanced diet for proper nutritional support.

## Integrated Care

If your child has juvenile dermatomyositis, the experts at Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare in [rheumatology](#) and [neuromuscular conditions](#) can offer specialized care to help manage symptoms and improve function.

Kids with JDM require full evaluations, correct diagnoses, and tailored treatments. As a regional referral center, Gillette treats hundreds of children annually who have juvenile dermatomyositis. We help kids improve function and mobility by reducing or eliminating the inflammation caused by juvenile dermatomyositis.

To give your child their best chance at leading a typical, active life we organize our treatment programs around the complex conditions that accompany juvenile dermatomyositis. Your child might receive care from experts in the following areas of service:

- [Child life](#).
- [Nutrition and feeding](#).
- [Psychology](#).
- [Radiology and imaging](#).
- [Rehabilitation therapies](#), including [physical therapy](#) and [occupational therapy](#).
- [Rheumatology](#).

Make An Appointment

[651-290-8707](#)

Refer a Patient

[651-325-2200](#)

This information is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice of your health care providers. If you have any questions, talk with your doctor or others on your health care team.

If you are a Gillette patient with urgent questions or concerns, please contact Telehealth Nursing at [651-229-3890](#).