

Causes of bone pain in children

Pain in children's joints can be due to different diseases, including septic arthritis, tumours, rheumatic diseases, genetic and congenital diseases, and other orthopaedic disorders. Joint pain caused by infections and tumours are rare, but can be life threatening. The pain may come together with swelling and a burning feeling around the affected part of the body, and may get worse over time.

Children under the age of 16, who experience such pain and swelling for more than six weeks should consult a doctor immediately. The child may be suffering from juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA) if the disorder is not due to diseases such as septic arthritis or leukaemia.

In Hong Kong, JIA affects about one in 1,000 to 2,000 children. The exact cause of JIA remains unknown but genetic factors, infections and exposure to certain chemicals and drugs may be contributing factors.

Systemic arthritis is the most severe type of JIA because it can damage organs and the arthritis is usually resistant to conventional medicine.

Polyarthritis (RF positive) is another disorder that mainly occurs in finger joints. Without timely proper treatment, permanent damage may occur in 1 to 2 years.

However, joint pain due to what is commonly known as "growing pains" is a benign condition. It is most common among children between the age of 4 to 12. Growing pains occur only occasionally, usually at night. Normally, it would not last more than 12 hours. The pain is felt in the lower part of the leg with no signs of swelling or redness. It will go away as the child grows up. Apply a hot pack to the affected part of the body, or massage it to relieve the pain.

If a child is seen walking with a limp or showing swelling or redness around the joints, or if the child has been experiencing pain for more than two weeks, a paediatrician should be consulted immediately.