

# International Center for Spinal Cord Injury at Kennedy Krieger Institute

## What You Should Know About Acute Flaccid Myelitis

We asked our pediatric spinal cord injury experts Dr. Cristina Sadowsky and Janet Dean about acute flaccid myelitis, also known as AFM



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### Q. What is AFM?

**A.** AFM is a rare condition that affects the body's nervous system, specifically the spinal cord. The exact cause of the illness is not known, though scientists think it is most likely the result of a viral infection.

### Q. What are the symptoms of AFM?

**A.** AFM is characterized by a sudden onset of limb weakness and a loss of muscle tone and reflexes. Additionally, some patients may experience:

- Facial drooping or weakness
- Difficulty moving one's eyes
- Drooping eyelids
- Difficulty swallowing or slurred speech
- Difficulty urinating

Numbness or tingling is rare in patients with AFM, though some patients have pain in their arms or legs. The most severe symptom of AFM is paralysis with respiratory failure, which can happen when the muscles involved with breathing become weak. This can require ventilator support.

### Q. What is the treatment for AFM?

**A.** While there is great uncertainty about the medical outcomes of children diagnosed with AFM, experts across the country agree that the most important treatment is early, intensive rehabilitation.

### Q: How does Kennedy Krieger Institute treat children with AFM?

**A.** Whether a child is treated in the inpatient unit or in the outpatient program at Kennedy Krieger, his or her care is provided by a team of experts in the treatment of spinal cord disease and related paralysis. We apply the principles

of activity-based restorative therapies, also known as ABRT, and create aggressive, individualized treatment plans with your child's well-being at the program's core. Treatment can include functional electrical stimulation, partial body weight-supported gait training, aquatic therapy and standing and weight-bearing exercises.

During treatment, your child will be evaluated by an interdisciplinary team that will make recommendations for medical management, home rehabilitative equipment, orthotics and any standing or walking equipment appropriate for your child.

Every child leaves Kennedy Krieger with an individualized home and community rehabilitation program. We assist families in finding specialists in their home communities with whom we can partner to ensure optimal ongoing care.

Children and their families are encouraged to return to Kennedy Krieger periodically for progress evaluations and to update their home and community rehabilitation programs. Rehabilitation for children with AFM may be a long process, but the professionals at Kennedy Krieger are there with you every step of the way.

### Q. What should I do if I'm concerned my child may have AFM?

**A.** If you believe you or your child has symptoms compatible with AFM, please contact your doctor as soon as possible to determine whether additional evaluation is needed.

### Q. Are there additional resources for more information?

- A.** Yes! Here are a few recommended resources:
- International Center for Spinal Cord Injury at Kennedy Krieger Institute  
[SpinalCordRecovery.org](http://SpinalCordRecovery.org)
  - Transverse Myelitis Association  
[Myelitis.org](http://Myelitis.org)
  - Centers for Disease Control  
[Cdc.gov](http://Cdc.gov)



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