

## What is benign reactive Lymphadenopathy?

Benign reactive lymphadenopathy is a term which means swollen lymph glands (also known as lymph nodes). It is commonly seen in children as they develop immunity to different germs.

## What are lymph glands and why do they become swollen?

Lymph glands are small nodules of specialised tissue, they are part of the body's immune system and therefore help the body fight infection. When they are fighting an infection they can become bigger and sometimes painful.

Lymph glands are distributed throughout the body however they are most commonly felt in the neck, armpits and groin. Your tonsils are also lymph glands.

Sometimes lymph glands become swollen for other reasons but these are very rare in children, however your doctor may want to do some tests to rule these out.

## Why do children get swollen lymph glands more than adults?

Children are building up protection against all of the different types of germs. This is a one off process every time they come into contact with a new germ. This is why their lymph glands become swollen more often than in adults, because they are constantly coming into contact with new germs they haven't met before. This also means their lymph glands can remain swollen longer than in adults.

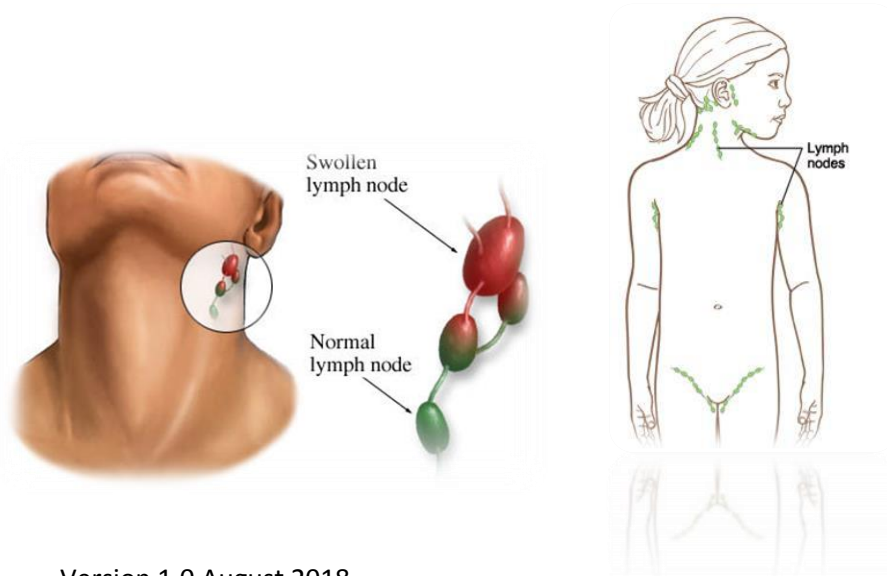
Commonly swollen lymph glands are found in the neck and throat after children meet a viral bug they haven't met before. However sometimes the infection can start in the lymph gland itself, for example when a germ comes in through the mouth and attacks the tonsils.

A lymph gland that becomes swollen slowly, over several weeks, without other signs of illness may be because of a rare bug or for another reason.

## Why do some children get swollen glands more often than others?

Up to 50% of children will have swollen glands at some point. Some children seem to suffer more frequently than others with colds and swollen glands. This is usually because they are exposed to more germs than other children. This might be because they have started attending nursery or have a sibling who attends school or nursery.

It can seem that children are continuously fighting infections. On average a child in the UK can have 4-6 viral infections in a single winter, also one viral infection can immediately be followed by another. Usually these infections are of ear, nose, throat and chest and therefore lymph glands in the neck and throat can stay enlarged for a long time.



**What should I do if my child has swollen lymph glands?**

If your child has swollen glands you should take them to your GP. They will ask questions about your child's recent illnesses and general health. Sometimes the cause of the swollen lymph glands will be very clear after these questions and no further tests will be needed. However sometimes the cause may not be so obvious, in this situation your GP may decide to do some tests. They might think about doing a blood test, throat swab, chest x-ray or ultrasound scan of the glands. These will help your doctor rule out more serious illnesses.

If your doctor thinks you have a bacterial infection they may prescribe you antibiotics. These will improve the pain and fever within a couple of days however the swollen lymph gland may not fully disappear. It can take more than a month for the glands to start getting smaller. In some young children the glands can stay enlarged for months or years. You may also notice that these glands get even bigger every time your child has a cold.

In the majority of cases the cause of the infection and swollen glands will be a virus. Antibiotics do not work on viruses and therefore in these cases antibiotics will not be prescribed. There is no treatment for common viral infections such as colds.

**What should I watch out for?**

If a swollen gland becomes very hot, red and tender and your child develops a fever, an abscess may have developed in the gland. In this case you should see your doctor. If the swelling continues to grow slowly and your child is losing weight or seems unwell you should also see your doctor.

**Contact:** Paeds secretaries numbers

**More info:** <https://patient.info/health/neck-lumps-and-bumps-leaflet/swollen-lymph-glands>

References: <https://www.stgeorges.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/reactive-lymphadenopathy.pdf>

If you have a visual impairment this leaflet can be made available in bigger print or on audiotape. If you require either of these options please contact the Patient Information Centre on 0161 922 5332

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Patient Information Leaflet