

Healthcare Safety Investigation Branch Summary (HSIB): Recognition of the Acutely Ill Infant

HSIB report (I2018/024) published in Dec 2021 investigates patient safety issues related to the ability of healthcare professionals to recognise when an infant is seriously ill.

Clinical Summary & Findings

Reference case: 3 month old, initial non-specific febrile presentation-> death from Men B Sepsis. Care across health visitors, 111, ambulance and A&E settings.

- Triage tools do not always account for differing skin tones which can impact assessment of physical signs
- Clinical decision supporting information is not always available e.g. trends in PEWS are not always considered.
- Staffing standards are not met, especially in hospitals without a paediatric A&E.
- It is hard for parents to articulate their concerns & they do not always feel heard
- Safety-netting advice is variable

HSIB Recommendations

- NHS System-wide Paediatric Observation Tracking (SPOT) program development should include ambulance service, 111, and primary care.
- ePEWS to have national standards on data capture, score calculation & data sharing across systems.
- SPOT to include examples of non-white skin showing signs of serious illness
- Research how listening to carer views impacts on recognition of a sick child, and whether examination pre/post antipyretics helps to differentiate those with serious illness
- Need for system-wide assessment of workforce capacity
- National assurance process to review and govern the educational material available for carers on assessment of unwell infant

Key Themes

- Need for a robust track and trigger tool that is readily interpretable, triggers appropriate response and is shared across community and hospital care
- Detection of clinical signs is impacted by medical education that historically focusses on diagnoses in light skin tones
- Quality safety-netting advice for parents is vital & its availability should be assured.
- Parent/Carer voice is integral to clinical assessment of a child

Local Improvement Activity suggestions from this report:

- Is your local site involved in SPOT program development? Review the PEWS system in use.
- Review parent/carers safety netting advice provision- Is it adequate? Accessible? Clear?
- Explore how parent/carers voice can be more clearly heard in your A&E
- Local education program on detection of clinical signs in all skin tones (see [Mind The Gap](#))

For full information visit:

www.hsib.org.uk/investigations-and-reports/recognition-of-acutely-ill-infant/ or

follow the QR code

