

Children with condition that causes temporary facial paralysis can recover without treatment

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Most children with a condition that causes a temporary weakness or paralysis of the muscles in the face recover without medication within

six months, according to a new study.

The research, led by the Murdoch Children's Research Institute and published in *Neurology*, found the steroid prednisolone does not significantly impact on a child's recovery from Bell's palsy.

Murdoch Children's Professor Franz Babl said while studies had shown steroid use in adults with Bell's palsy helped improve symptoms by minimizing facial nerve swelling and damage within the temporal bone, similar research hadn't been available for children.

The randomized-controlled trial involved 187 participants, aged six months to 17 years, who presented to emergency departments (EDs) with Bell's palsy. The study was staged in 11 ED's in the Pediatric Research in Emergency Departments International Collaborative (PREDICT) research network in Australia and New Zealand. They were recruited within 72 hours after symptom onset and received 10 days of treatment with prednisolone or a placebo (no active drug).

The study found 57% of those who didn't take any medication recovered facial function at one month, 85% at three months and 93% at six months. For those assigned prednisolone, 49% recovered at one month, 90% at three months and 99% at six months. There were no [serious side effects](#) recorded during the trial and the most common adverse reactions were temporary changes in behavior and increased appetite.

Bell's palsy, which causes half of the face to droop, is the third most common condition causing a sudden change in nerve function in children. In most cases the exact cause of the facial weakness is unknown but may be related to a viral infection.

"The lack of evidence on the use of steroids in children with Bell's palsy in children has led to variable practice in their treatment," Professor

Babl said. Discovering that early treatment with [prednisolone](#) doesn't hasten recovery will help GPs, emergency physicians and pediatricians in their discussion with affected families and make better informed decisions."

More information: Franz E Babl et al, Efficacy of Prednisolone for Bell Palsy in Children: A Randomized, Double-Blind, Placebo-Controlled, Multicenter Trial, *Neurology* (2022). [DOI: 10.1212/WNL.0000000000201164](#)

Provided by Murdoch Children's Research Institute

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