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# Misleading Headlines on Child Inflammatory Syndrome May Cause Parents More Anxiety: Psychologist

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By [Kevin Hogan](#) | May 20, 2020

A cluster of cases of a rare inflammatory syndrome has surfaced in New York. The link between this illness and the CCP virus is unproven. Yet some headlines and newscasts have pushed it into the limelight by alluding to a definite link.

“Then you read the fine print, in this case, the article and you find out that well, no, there’s really no relationship. Well, one of the implications is they’ll sell more newspapers. The other one is, unfortunately, that that will escalate people’s already high levels of anxiety,” psychologist Dr. Robert Reiner told NTD in an interview.

A rare inflammatory illness is affecting young people in the state of New York. Three have died in the state and a 9-year-old boy has passed from the illness in Marseille, France.

There is no conclusive evidence that the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) virus, which causes COVID-19, leads to this rare syndrome—yet several media companies bring this potential link to the forefront of their reporting.

Reiner, who is also the executive director and founder of Behavioral Associates said this is causing parents more anxiety.

“Well, there’s been a lot of media attention about this new inflammatory disease noted in kids. Parents’ anxiety level is already jacked up pretty high. And this is just one more thing to worry about,” he said.

Several headlines are mixing this illness with COVID-19, but scientists tell us they are only potentially related.

For example, a headline from Reuters on May 14 reads: “U.S. to Tell Doctors to Report Cases of COVID-19 Inflammatory Syndrome in Kids.”

Yet at the end of the article, it states that “scientists are still trying to determine whether the syndrome is linked with the new coronavirus because not all children with it have tested positive for the virus.”

It’s not clear why the article’s title assumes COVID-19 is the cause, because the body of the article says the cause is uncertain. Reiner says reporting like this may lead to more anxiety.

By the same token, NBC also jumped to conclusions about the causal relationship between COVID-19 and the childhood affliction in their broadcast.

“The number of new coronavirus cases overall may be going down, but the number of children known to be developing a dangerous response to COVID-19 appears to be going up,” NBC Reporter Melissa Russo said.

According to an editorial from the journal *Hospital Pediatrics* (pdf), media activity like this can directly affect doctors and their patients. The medical journal states that “heightened awareness from all of the recent media attention might trigger an increase in KD diagnoses in patients who previously would not have been diagnosed.”

Kawasaki disease called KD—which is what this inflammatory syndrome is similar to—can be an ambiguous diagnosis in the first place, according to the journal.

“Certainly when something’s in the media, and people’s anxiety levels are jacked up the way they are right now, these kind of over-diagnosing certain symptoms are going to occur all the time,” Reiner said.

Reiner says this is something we need to watch out for. He thinks the nature of science should be healthy skepticism.