Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children, Chile, May–August 2020

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We describe 26 children with multisystem inflammatory syndrome associated with coronavirus disease in the pediatric intensive care unit of Roberto del Río Hospital (Santiago, Chile). In total, 10 (38.5%) children required mechanical ventilation; 13 (50.0%) required inotropic support. In addition, 18 (69.2%) patients had echocardiographic abnormalities. No patients died.

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared a coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Acute respiratory failure is the most common complication of COVID-19 in adults (1); as of February 2021, COVID-19 has been associated with 2.4 million deaths according to the World Health Organization (https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/weekly-epidemiological-update---23-february-2021). Most children and adolescents with COVID-19 have mild disease that does not require medical intervention (2).

In April 2020, a total of 8 previously healthy children with hyperinflammatory shock in the United Kingdom tested positive for antibodies against severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), the causative agent of COVID-19 (3). Consequently, the Royal College of Pediatrics and Child Health proposed the diagnosis of multisystem inflammatory syndrome associated with COVID-19 in children (MIS-C), defined as a persistent fever, inflammation, and evidence of organ dysfunction, after the exclusion of any other microbial cause, with or without PCR confirmation of SARS-CoV-2 infection (4). On May 14, 2020, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued an advisory for MIS-C; the same day, the World Health Organization also issued a report with a case definition of MIS-C (https://emergency.cdc.gov/han/2020/han00432.asp). Researchers have since reported similar cases in the United States (5) and Europe (6–9). The signs and symptoms of MIS-C can resemble Kawasaki disease, toxic shock syndrome, hemophagocytic lymphohistiocytosis, and macrophage activation syndrome (10).

Few publications on COVID-19 in children (11) and MIS-C (12) have reviewed cases in Latin America. We describe the clinical characteristics, treatment, and results of a cohort of children admitted to the pediatric intensive care unit (PICU) with MIS-C in a tertiary hospital in Chile.

The Study
We analyzed patients with MIS-C treated in the PICU of Roberto del Río Hospital (Santiago, Chile) during May 11–August 30, 2020 (Figure). We used the case definition of MIS-C proposed by the Ministry of Public Health of Chile (13).

We collected demographic data, medical history, clinical symptoms, and physical examination findings, as well as results of imaging, cardiac, and laboratory tests conducted during the patient’s stay in the emergency room and PICU. We also analyzed data on treatment, complications, outcome, and length of PICU and total hospital stay. The institutional ethics committee of Roberto del Río Hospital approved the study protocol. We described categorical variables with absolute frequencies and percentages; we described continuous variables with medians and IQRs.

Of the 33 patients with SARS-COV-2 who were hospitalized in the PICU during the study period, 26 met the definition for MIS-C. In total, 16 (61.5%) of these 26 patients met the criteria for Kawasaki disease. The median age was 6.5 years (IQR 2–10.5 years); 15 (57.7%) patients were male. Only 1 patient had a chronic underlying condition (Table 1, https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/EID/article/27/5/20-4591-T1.htm) (14).
Children and adolescents 0–9 years old with fever >3 days with ≥2 of the following criteria:
• Bilateral nonsuppurative rash, conjunctivitis, or mucocutaneous involvement
• Hypotension or shock
• Myocardial dysfunction, pericarditis, valvulitis, coronary abnormalities (echocardiographic data), or elevation of myocardial damage parameters (troponins or Pro-BNP)
• Coagulopathy (PT or APTT alterations, d-dimer elevation >1,000 ng/mL)
• Gastrointestinal involvement (vomiting, diarrhea, or abdominal pain)

and
Elevation of CRP >50 mg/L or PCT >1 ng/dL
and
Without other provable etiologies that explain the case
and
Evidence of COVID-19 infection (PCR positive for SARS-CoV-2, serologic or epidemiologic link)

Figure. Treatment algorithm for children with multisystem inflammatory syndrome associated with COVID-19, Chile, May–August 2020. †Prophylactic anticoagulation was considered if D-dimer was >1,000 ng/dL or progressively increasing: treatment was 1 mg/kg/d of low molecular weight heparin (Enoxaparin). When thrombosis was suspected or confirmed, the dose was increased to 1 mg/kg every 12 hours and adjusted with anti-Xa factor activity. ‡Favorable response was considered absence of fever for 48 hours, hemodynamic stability, and improvement of inflammatory parameters. AAS, acetylsalicylic acid; APTT, activated partial thromboplastin time; COVID-19, coronavirus disease; CRP, C-reactive protein; IVIG, intravenous immunoglobulin; KD, Kawasaki disease; MIS-C, pediatric inflammatory multisystem syndrome temporally associated with coronavirus disease; PCT, procalcitonin; pro-BNP, pro–brain natriuretic peptide; PT, prothrombin time; SARS-CoV-2, severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2.
In total, 22 (84.6%) patients tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 infection, 7 (26.9%) by reverse transcription PCR and 15 (57.6%) by serologic assay. The other 4 (15.3%) patients tested negative for SARS-CoV-2 but had a COVID-19 exposure. The most frequent symptoms were fever (26, 100%), shock (24, 92.3%), abdominal pain (17, 65.4%), diarrhea (16, 61.5%), vomiting (12, 46.2%), rash (16, 61.5%), and conjunctivitis (15, 57.7%) (Table 1).

We also collected data on laboratory test values (Table 2), critical care interventions, treatments, and outcomes (Table 1). Ten (38.5%) patients required mechanical ventilation for a median duration of 4 days (IQR 2.5–5 days). Only 1 (3.8%) patient met the criteria for acute respiratory distress syndrome; that patient had an oxygenation index of 25. Half (13, 50.0%) of the patients required vasoactive drugs. We used high-flow hemofiltration as salvage therapy for refractory shock in 1 patient. No patients required extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO). In total, 20 (76.9%) patients had echocardiographic findings described in the literature (9).

In total, 22 (84.6%) patients had laboratory-confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infection. However, whereas many (57.6%) had antibodies against SARS-CoV-2, only 7 (26.9%) tested positive by PCR. These findings suggest that MIS-C might be caused by a hyper-inflammatory response after asymptomatic SARS-CoV-2 infection, rather than direct cell injury from active viral replication. Although the syndrome’s pathophysiology has been correlated with the cytokine storm described in adults with severe COVID-19 (13), the mechanisms of MIS-C remain unclear.

We observed clinical manifestations similar to those described internationally (5–9). In this cohort, the most frequent manifestation was fever with gastrointestinal symptoms (65.4%), in agreement with findings described in the literature (8). Similar to previous reports (5–9), our results showed almost all patients had cardiovascular involvement: 92% had shock and 50% required vasoactive support. Although Roberto del Río Hospital is a

### Table 2. Laboratory test values of 26 children with multisystem inflammatory syndrome associated with coronavirus disease, Chile, May–August 2020*

| Test                              | Median value (IQR) | Reference range |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Leukocytes, mm³                   | 10,540.0 (7,400.0–15,900.0) | 4,500–11,000 |
| Lymphocytes, mm³                  | 1,080.0 (732.5–2,579.5) | 1,500–4,000 |
| Platelets, mm³                    | 175,000.0 (66,000.0–232,000.0) | 150,000–400,000 |
| Alburnin, g/dL                    | 3.1 (2.9–3.4) | 3.4–5.4 |
| Troponins, ng/mL†                 | 0.1 (0.0–1.8) | <0.034 |
| Creatine phosphokinase, U/L       | 133.5 (55.5–234.0) | 32–294 |
| Creatine kinase-MB, U/L           | 2.2 (1.1–11.9) | <12 |
| C-reactive protein, mg/L          | 134.0 (94.0–300.5) | <5 |
| Procalcitonin, mg/mL†             | 13.0 (2.39–38.0) | <0.5 |
| Ferritin, ng/mL                   | 206.5 (91.5–368.8) | 15–150 |
| Triglycerides, mg/dL              | 175.5 (103.0–244.5) | <75 |
| Lactate dehydrogenase, U/L        | 288.0 (257.0–357.0) | 105–333 |
| Glutamic oxaloacetic transaminase, U/L | 45.0 (32.0–86.0) | 0–40 |
| Fibrinogen, mg/mL                 | 457.0 (375.0–513.0) | 200–400 |
| D-dimer, ng/mL                    | 1,700.0 (730.0–3,500.0) | <500 |
| Creatinine, mg/dL                 | 0.6 (0.4–1.2) | 0.8 (0.5–1.5) | Varies‡ |
| Type B natriuretic pro-peptide, pg/mL§ | 1,749.0 (255.8–4,722.8) | <125 |
| Interleukin 6, g/ml¶              | 322.0 (95.5–621.8) | <3.4 |

*Emergency department indicates value at admission; intensive care unit value indicates most severe value. IQR, interquartile range; NA, not available.
†Troponins and procalcitonin were only measured in the intensive care unit.
‡Creatine reference ranges: <1 mo, 0.3–1.0 mg/dL; 1–12 mo, 0.2–0.4 mg/dL; 1–12 y, 0.3–0.7 mg/dL; >12 y, 0.5–1.1 mg/dL.
§Only determined in 8 patients.
¶Only determined in 10 patients.
An emerging clinical entity following SARS-CoV-2 infection is multi-system inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C) (1). The condition has been temporally associated with SARS-CoV-2 in Europe and the United States (5–9). According to our treatment protocol, we administered tocilizumab to 3 (11.7%) children; we administered infliximab to 1 (3.8%) child with a medium coronary aneurysm. The main limitations of this study are small sample size and descriptive, nonrandomized design.

In conclusion, we described 26 children with MIS-C in Chile. Our findings were similar to those reported in other countries. Most patients had echocardiographic abnormalities, and half required vasoprotective drug support. We administered immunomodulatory therapy to most patients. Clinical trials and long-term follow-up are needed to elucidate the mechanisms of various treatments and potential sequelae of this condition.

Acknowledgments
We thank all the health professionals in the pediatric intensive care unit of Roberto del Río Hospital (Santiago, Chile). We also thank the COVID-19 Committee of Roberto del Río Hospital.

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