Too many children are reaching "crisis point" before type 1 diabetes is recognised

Citation: Diabetes UK (2026) Too many children are reaching "crisis point" before type 1 diabetes is recognised. *Diabetes & Primary Care* **28**: [Early view publication]

Summary and call to action

- This World Diabetes Day, Diabetes UK is launching a major awareness drive with one urgent message: "Share the signs – and save a life."
- "Think type 1 diabetes" and test immediately with a fingerprick blood glucose test if someone presents with **any** one of the 4Ts symptoms – Toilet, Thirsty, Tired, Thinner – even if another diagnosis seems more likely.
- Act urgently if the result suggests type 1 diabetes, following your local pathway for same-day assessment, diagnosis and treatment. Diabetes UK's type 1 diabetes diagnosis pathway for children is a quick reminder of what to do.

The recorded rate of children being diagnosed with type 1 diabetes while in diabetic ketoacidosis (DKA), a potentially fatal medical emergency, is rising and reached an eight-year high in 2024–25.

National Paediatric Diabetes Audit data shows the number of children diagnosed with type 1 diabetes in DKA has risen from 20% in 2017/18 to 28% in 2024/25. The latest data shows that, between April 2024 and March 2025 in England and Wales, a total of 902 children aged 15 years and under were in DKA at the time of diagnosis (Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, 2026). The figures are particularly concerning in the youngest age group, where one-third of children under five (33%) were diagnosed in DKA.

Data published in July by NHS England also highlights significant variations depending on where you live (Aswani et al, 2026). Rates of DKA at diagnosis among children and young people range from 27% to 51% across Integrated Care Boards in England. This variation suggests there are opportunities to reduce DKA at diagnosis by learning from areas with the lowest rates and ensuring best practice is implemented consistently across the NHS.

Similar concerns are seen elsewhere in the UK. The Scottish Government (2021) estimates that around 30% of children are diagnosed with type 1 diabetes in DKA, rising to almost 40% in children under five. There are no statistics recorded for Northern Ireland.

In response to these concerning findings, for this year's World Diabetes Day (Saturday 14 November), Diabetes UK is launching a major awareness drive around the main symptoms of type 1 diabetes – known as the 4Ts – and urging everyone to "share the signs – and save a life".

The 4Ts symptoms of type 1 diabetes

The 4Ts symptoms of type 1 diabetes are:

- **Toilet:** going for a wee more often, especially at night. Heavier nappies in babies, new bedwetting in children.
- **Thirsty:** constant thirst, or feeding more in babies.
- **Tired:** feeling unusually tired, napping more or for longer, and changes in behaviour such as irritability or difficulty concentrating at school.
- **Thinner:** unexplained weight loss or looking thinner.

In younger children, these symptoms can be harder to detect, as they may appear alongside common childhood illnesses such as flu, gastroenteritis and urinary tract infections, meaning there is a risk of type 1 diabetes going undetected, particularly in busy frontline settings. However, a simple fingerprick blood glucose test can quickly identify the condition. Prompt

"A type 1 diabetes diagnosis should never start with a medical emergency. Yet every year, hundreds of UK families face the heartbreaking reality of seeing their children reach crisis point before anyone recognises the condition. For almost a decade, we have seen no improvement in these figures – and that has to change, starting now."

– Colette Marshall, Chief Executive at Diabetes UK

testing could help avoid an emergency hospital admission, prevent DKA and save a life.

How Diabetes UK can help

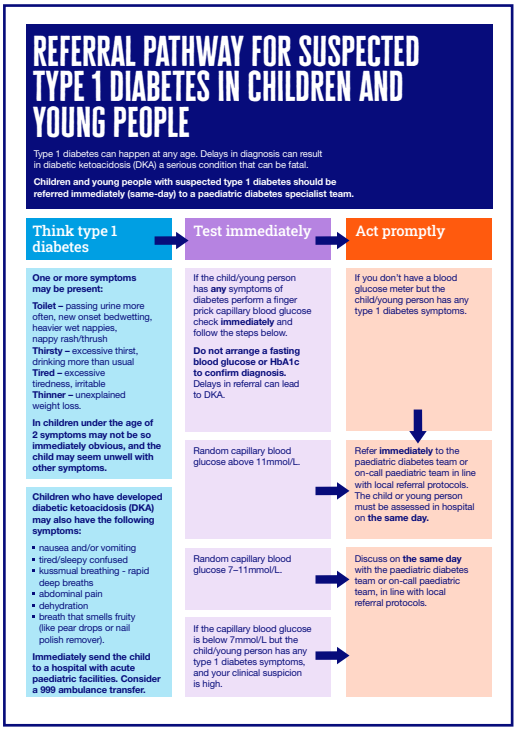
To raise awareness of the 4Ts and support earlier diagnosis, Diabetes UK has created new downloadable posters, alongside an updated referral pathway for frontline healthcare professionals on its website. A new 4Ts awareness animation has been created, and it is hoped this will be shared far and wide on World Diabetes Day and beyond.

- Posters for the 4Ts can be downloaded here.
- Further information about DKA can be found here.
- Further information about type 1 diabetes can be found here.
- A referral pathway for suspected type 1 diabetes in children can be downloaded here. ■

Aswani N, Mehta F, Kar P (2026) *Diabetes: Children and young adults. CIRFT programme national speciality report*. NHS England, London. Available at: https://bit.ly/4AjehMF

Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (2026) *National Paediatric Diabetes Audit (NPDA) annual report on 2024–25 data*. Available at: https://bit.ly/4zcUOfl

Scottish Government (2021) *Diabetes care – progress against national priorities: commitments – 2021 to 2026*. Available at: https://bit.ly/4zCIJS5



Help ensure children with type 1 diabetes get the care they need as early as possible. Display this leaflet in your surgery, hospital, pharmacy or other place of work to help healthcare professionals make the right diagnosis at the right time.

Click the thumbnail to access.