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Mystery Virus Likely to Hit Kids Across the Country

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A health alert has been issued after more than 1,000 children have been sickened by a rare virus that starts off like the common cold but sends some kids rushing to the hospital when they can't breathe.

The potentially deadly mystery virus is spreading across the country, health experts say.

The respiratory illness with symptoms that mimic a common cold hasn't been officially identified, but doctors at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suspect it's a rare virus called human enterovirus 68.

"My lungs started to close up," said 13-year-old Will Cornejo, who had to be rushed to a Colorado hospital.

"White as a ghost, blue lips, he just passed out," his mother said.

Doctors say children like Will, who have asthma, and those under the age of five are the most vulnerable.

"It can start just like a cold, so runny nose, sneezing, (covered) coughs, but it's the wheezing you have to watch out for," said ABC News' Chief Health and Medical Editor Dr. Richard Besser.

In Colorado, at one hospital alone doctors have seen more than 900 children with symptoms. At a hospital in Kansas City, Missouri, more than 300 children are reporting symptoms, ABC News reports.

According to Mark Pallansch, director of the Division of Viral Diseases at the CDC, similar cases to the ones in Colorado have been cropping up across the U.S. At least 10 states -- Missouri, Kansas, Illinois, Kentucky, Iowa, Colorado, Ohio, Oklahoma, North Carolina, and Georgia -- have reported suspected outbreaks of human enterovirus 68 and requested CDC support.

"It's going to be across the country, so if your state doesn't have it now, watch for it. It's coming," Dr. Besser said.

There's no vaccine for the virus.

To stay healthy, the CDC recommends basic sanitary practices to avoid spreading the virus, including washing hands, avoiding those who are sick, and covering the nose and mouth during sneezes or coughs.

Parents of asthmatic children should make sure that their children's inhalers are easily accessible and that there is a treatment plan in place if an asthma attack continues to get worse.