

CT Children's CLASP Guideline Family Handout

Early Onset Pubic Hair

What is premature adrenarche?

The adrenal glands are located on top of the kidneys and make a number of important hormones, including adrenal androgens. These adrenal androgens cause some of the normal pubertal changes we see, such as the development of pubic and axillary hair, acne, and adult-type body odor; this is what we call adrenarche. Adrenarche is not the same as puberty but usually begins around the same time as puberty.

When these changes appear early, a child most likely has *premature adrenarche*. The key features of premature adrenarche include:

- Appearance of pubic and/or underarm hair in girls younger than 8 years or boys younger than 9 years
- Adult-type underarm odor, often requiring use of deodorants
- Absence of breast development in girls or of genital enlargement in boys (which, if present, often points to the diagnosis of true precocious (early) puberty)

In premature adrenarche, the adrenal gland is not making more androgens than usual; it is just happening earlier than expected. These adrenal androgen hormones, which cause the early pubic hair and odor, are different from the hormones that cause breast enlargement (estrogen coming from the ovaries) or growth of the penis (testosterone from the testes). Thus, a young girl who has only pubic hair and body odor will be unlikely to have early periods, which usually do not start until at least 2 years after true breast enlargement begins.

If your child's body is showing any changes concerning for true early puberty (breast growth in girls younger than 8 years or enlargement of the testicles in boys younger than 9 years of age), it is important for them to be evaluated by their healthcare provider to determine the best plan of care and whether additional testing is needed.

Is premature adrenarche serious?

In most cases, this condition is not something to worry about and just means that a child is experiencing the bodily changes associated with adrenarche a little sooner than peers.

How is premature adrenarche treated?

The early appearance of pubic hair or body odor does not require treatment. There is no treatment that will cause the pubic and/or underarm odor to disappear. Your child's doctor will monitor them over time and check in on how your child is growing. Most of the time, regular bloodwork is not needed unless there is a new concern.

Remember that your child is experiencing these changes earlier than expected and before many of his or her peers. Supporting your child and helping them adjust to these changes is important.

*adapted from Pediatric Endocrine Society Patient Resources: <https://pedsendo.org/patient-resource/premature-adrenarche/>