Musculoskeletal infections are serious and potentially life-threatening. Musculoskeletal infections include necrotizing fasciitis, septic arthritis, osteomyelitis, and pyomyositis. The prompt recognition and treatment of children with these conditions is important in improving their outcomes.

The Initial Work Up

The first step in identifying a musculoskeletal infection is having a high index of suspicion. Subtle signs such as fever with a slight limp or joint swelling in the absence of trauma may be the initial presentation for a severe musculoskeletal infection. Signs and symptoms that should alert the clinician to a possible musculoskeletal infection and lead to an initial workup for these conditions include children who present with the following signs or symptoms, with or without fever ≥ 38.3°C (100.9°F):

1. Limb pain
2. Joint effusion
3. Reluctance to bear weight or use an extremity
4. Pain out of proportion to the exam
5. Fixed joint (pseudoparalysis)
6. Point tenderness over the bony metaphysis
7. Hip rests in a position of flexion, abduction, and external rotation
8. Previous health care visit for the same problem