**KIDS DRUG WARNING**

**Ritalin hyperactivity drug linked to heart problems in children**

REVEALED

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Researchers are urging medics to ‘carefully weigh’ the benefits of prescribing ADHD drug as risks are revealed

**HYPERACTIVITY drug Ritalin has been linked to an increased risk of heart problems in kids.**

Researchers are urging medics to “carefully weigh” the benefits of prescribing it even though they admit the danger is only slight.

The stimulant methylphenidate is better known by trade name Ritalin

The alert follows a study into the stimulant methylphenidate, which is used to treat attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and narcolepsy.

Ritalin is the most well-known trade name.

The researchers examined 1,224 patients aged up to 17 who suffered a “cardiac event” after taking the drug.

The drug is a common prescription for children suffering from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD

This included 864 patients with an abnormal heart rhythm (arrhythmia), 396 with high blood pressure, 52 with heart attacks, 67 with stroke, and 44 with heart failure.

The risk of abnormal heart rhythm rose 61 per cent in the first two months of use.

The first three days were most critical, according to the international study by teams in Australia, South Korea and Canada.

The stimulants are known to slightly raise blood pressure and accelerate the heart rate but their safety has been hotly debated and the evidence is conflicting.

Researcher Ju-Young Shin from Jewish General Hospital, Canada, advised caution when prescribing the drug to kids

The risk was also more pronounced in children with existing congenital heart disease, the academics from Australia, Canada and South Korea found.

The results – published in the British Medical Journal – prompted researchers to suggest that methylphenidate use might “trigger” the occurrence of arrhythmia in individual patients.

John Jackson, from Harvard School of Public Health, US, said the option of non-stimulants for kids needs to be considered

Chief researcher Ju-Young Shin, from Jewish General Hospital, Canada, said: “The benefits should be carefully weighed against potential cardiovascular risks of these drugs in children and adolescents.”

John Jackson, from Harvard School of Public Health, US, added: “The study underscores the need to consider the severity of ADHD symptoms and the option of non-stimulants for children.”

He went on to say regulatory labelling and treatment guidelines for stimulants recommend caution using these drugs in children with history of cardiovascular disease.