

Viral Rash (Exanthem)

What is a viral rash?

A viral skin rash is also called an exanthema. The rash is most often seen in children from 1 to 6 years of age, but can be seen at any age. Often times, the rash is the only symptom. The rash may look different from one person to the next, and may itch. It can be anywhere on the body, but is most common on the face, trunk, arms and legs. The rash normally goes away in 2 to 3 weeks, but can last as long as 12 weeks.



What causes it?

The rash may come after a viral illness such as fever, cold, sore throat, etc. Any virus can cause it, but it is more common with viral infections, such as coxsackie or parainfluenza. It may also be seen with some immunizations such as MMR, polio, DPT and BCG. Not all children who have the virus will have the rash.

How is it diagnosed?

A viral rash is diagnosed by the way it looks, its location and other symptoms.

How is it treated?

Most often no treatment is needed. If your child is uncomfortable from the rash, medicine may be given. The medicine will either be for the skin or one that is taken by mouth.

Special information

Once the rash appears, your child is no longer contagious. This means your child may go back to school or day care.

ALERT: Call your child's doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any questions or concerns or if your child has special health care needs that were not covered by this information.

This teaching sheet is meant to help you care for your child. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up.