

Viral Rash (Exanthem)

What is a viral rash?

A viral skin rash, also called an “exanthem”, is most often seen in children from 1 to 6 years of age. It can be seen in children as young as 3 months and as old as 15 years. It is not unusual for the rash to be the only symptom. The rash may look different from one person to the next, and may cause itching. It is often seen on the face, bottom, arms and legs, but it can be anywhere on the body. The rash usually goes away in 2 - 3 weeks, but can last as long as 8 weeks.

What causes it?

The rash often follows symptoms of viral illness such as fever, cold, sore throat, etc. It is seen with viral infections, such as coxsackie or parainfluenza. It may also be seen with immunizations (MMR, polio, DPT and BCG vaccinations). Less commonly, it has been seen in hepatitis B infections. 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 signs and symptoms.

How is it treated?

Most often no treatment is needed. If your child is uncomfortable from the rash, medicines for the skin or medicine that is taken by mouth can help with the itching.

Special Information

With this type of rash, once it appears, your child is no longer contagious and 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 provide you with additional information about your child’s care. Diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up should be provided by your health care professional.