

Patient Information for Viral exanthem

Overview

Viral exanthem, also known as non-specific viral rash, is a rash caused by a viral infection. Many viruses can cause a similar-appearing rash, so it is difficult to tell which one is the culprit. Your age, duration of illness, and other symptoms may suggest which virus is the cause. Respiratory and stomach (gastrointestinal) viruses are common causes of such a rash.

Who's At Risk

Viral exanthem is common in children and young adults who are not yet immune to a number of common viral infections. When an adult gets a non-specific viral rash, it might be caused by a drug reaction.

Signs & Symptoms

A widespread rash of pink-to-red spots or bumps occurs primarily on the trunk, arms, and legs. The rash may or may not be itchy. Sometimes, the person does not feel well and might have a fever, fatigue, headache, loss of appetite, aches and pains, and irritability.

Self-Care Guidelines

- For mild symptoms, no treatment is required, as the rash and illness often last only a few days and then go away.
- Acetaminophen (Tylenol) may be helpful in lowering the fever and reducing aches and pains.
- Drink plenty of liquids and get lots of bed rest.

When to Seek Medical Care

See your doctor if you have any of the following:

- A temperature over 101 degrees that lasts more than a day
- Severe headache, stiff neck, confusion, unconsciousness, or seizures
- Diarrhea and/or vomiting and severe abdominal pain
- Severe cough or sputum with pus or blood
- Spots, swelling, and redness on the palms or soles, blisters, swollen and painful joints
- Red eyes, mouth, or tongue
- Rash that is bright red and does not fade (blanch) with finger pressure

Treatments Your Physician May Prescribe

Blood tests or procedures to grow out viruses or bacteria (cultures) may be done to look for more serious causes of your rash.

If a serious bacterial or other infection is suspected, antibiotics may be given.