



SKIN RASHES IN BABIES





All about...

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Skin rashes in babies:

It's normal for babies to develop rashes from as early as a few days old, as their sensitive skin adapts to a different environment. Most rashes are harmless and go away on their own.

But if your baby has developed a rash and seems unwell or you're worried, see your GP to find out the cause and receive any necessary treatment.

It's especially important to be aware of the symptoms of meningitis.

This guide may give you a better idea of the cause of the rash, but don't use it to diagnose your baby's condition. Always see a GP for a proper diagnosis.

It also describes the warning signs of meningitis and explains what to do if you're worried about your baby.

The causes of rashes in older children are covered separately.

Baby acne (neonatal acne)



Pimples sometimes develop on a baby's cheeks, nose and forehead within a month of their birth. These tend to get worse before clearing up completely after a few weeks or months.

Washing your baby's face with water and a mild moisturiser can improve the appearance of their skin.

Avoid acne medicines intended for older children and adults.

Pimples or blackheads that develop after 3 months of age (infantile acne) tend to be more severe and often need medical treatment.

Cradle cap



Cradle cap is where yellowish, greasy scaly patches develop on a baby's scalp. Occasionally, the face, ears and neck are also affected.

Cradle cap isn't itchy and shouldn't bother your baby. If your baby is scratching or upset, they may have eczema.

Cradle cap is a common condition that tends to develop within 2 or 3 months of birth. It usually gets better without treatment in a few weeks or months.

Gently washing your baby's hair and scalp with baby shampoo may help prevent further patches developing. Read more about treating cradle cap.

Eczema



Eczema is a long-term condition that causes the skin to become itchy, red, dry and cracked.

The most common form is atopic eczema, which mainly affects babies and children but can continue into adulthood.

Eczema in babies under 6 months is sometimes associated with allergies to milk and egg.

Atopic eczema often starts in young babies as a red, itchy rash on the face, scalp and body.

As the child gets older, it usually starts to develop in areas with folds of skin, such as behind the knees or on the front of the elbows.

Creams and ointments can often relieve the symptoms.

Erythema toxicum

Half of all newborns develop a blotchy red skin reaction called erythema toxicum, usually at 2 or 3 days old.

It's a normal newborn rash that won't bother your baby, and clears after a few days.

Hand, foot and mouth disease



Hand, foot and mouth disease is a common viral illness that causes a blistery rash on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet, as well as ulcers in the mouth.

Your baby may also feel unwell and have a fever.

Treatment isn't usually needed as the baby's immune system clears the virus, and symptoms go away after about 7 to 10 days. If you're worried, see your GP.

Hives (urticaria)



Hives (also known as urticaria) is a raised, red itchy rash that appears on the skin.

It happens when a trigger (such as a food that your baby is allergic to) causes a substance called histamine to be released into their skin.

If your baby gets urticaria during feeding, the condition may be triggered by something they've had to eat or drink. The most common foods are egg and milk, but many other foods can sometimes be the cause.

The urticaria rash is usually short-lived and can be controlled with antihistamines. Read more about treating hives.

If your baby gets hives repeatedly, it's important to see your GP to discuss possible allergies.

Impetigo



Impetigo is a highly contagious bacterial infection of the surface layers of the skin that causes sores and blisters. It's not usually serious, but you can visit your GP for a prescription of antibiotics, which should clear the infection within 7 to 10 days.

Milia



About half of all newborns develop tiny (1-2mm) white spots called milia on their face. These are just blocked pores and usually clear within the first 4 weeks of life.

Nappy rash



Nappy rash occurs when the skin around the baby's nappy area becomes irritated. This is often caused by prolonged exposure to wee or poo, but can sometimes be the result of a fungal infection or rare skin condition.

You can usually reduce nappy rash by taking simple steps to keep your baby's skin clean and dry, and using a barrier cream if needed.

Antifungal cream may be necessary if the rash is caused by a fungal infection.

Ringworm



Ringworm is a common fungal skin infection that causes a ring-like red rash almost anywhere on the body (the baby's scalp, feet and groin are common areas).

It's usually easily treated using over-the-counter creams.

Scabies



Scabies is a common infestation of the skin that can affect people of all ages. It's caused by tiny mites that burrow into the skin.

It's often spread between family members, so when babies get scabies it's usually because someone else in the family had it recently.

Babies with scabies develop tiny and very itchy spots all over the body, including on the soles of the feet, armpits and genital area.

Treatment with creams that kill the scabies mite needs to be given to the whole family at the same time for it to be effective.

Slapped cheek syndrome



Slapped cheek syndrome is a viral infection particularly common in children and babies.

It typically causes a bright red rash on both cheeks and a fever.

Most babies won't need treatment, as slapped cheek syndrome is usually a mild condition that passes in a few days.

Sweat rash (miliaria)

A heat rash, sometimes called miliaria or prickly heat, may flare up when your baby sweats – for example, because they're dressed in too many clothes or the environment is hot and humid.

It's a sign your baby's sweat glands have become blocked. They may develop tiny red bumps or blisters on their skin, but these will soon clear without treatment.

Meningitis warning signs

It's important to be aware of the warning signs of meningitis in your baby.

These include:

- becoming floppy and unresponsive, or stiff with jerky movements
- becoming irritable and not wanting to be held
- unusual crying
- vomiting and refusing feeds
- pale and blotchy skin
- loss of appetite
- staring expression
- very sleepy with a reluctance to wake up
- fever

Some babies develop a swelling in the soft part of their head (fontanelle).

Trust your instincts. If you think your baby has meningitis, see your GP immediately or go to your nearest accident and emergency (A&E) department.