



Viral Exanthem

What it is?

A harmless rash that occurs when a child is recovering from a virus. The rash is not from a drug allergy and is not a sign of an allergic reaction. This rash occurs more in children than adults and signifies that a child's virus is no longer contagious. They usually last about several days (though depending on the virus, may last as long as a few weeks).

Cause

There are numerous childhood colds and fever viruses that result in a viral exanthem. For most viral exanthems, we cannot identify the specific virus for which the rash was caused. In these cases, the symptoms before the rash can be as mild as a few days of "sniffles" or could follow a cold or flu-like illness with fever. Then, when the virus is improving, the rash appears, and signals that the virus is no longer contagious. The viral rash is a great sign, because it explains that the child's symptoms should be improving.

There is one viral exanthem that's easier to identify, called Roseola. Roseola is a cold and fever virus that causes high fevers (103-105°F) lasting as many as 5 days. At the point when parents are often convinced something is seriously wrong, the fever disappears, and a rash develops. This viral rash is a welcome sign indicating the worst of the illness is over. Photos of roseola can be found [here](#) or →



Treatment

Since this rash typically isn't bothersome, no medication is needed. It will go away with no treatment within several days (though depending on the virus, may last as long as a few weeks). Itching can be reported; in this case, it's fine to offer Zyrtec (cetirizine). It's safe for those 6 months and up. Dose is found [here](#) or →



A few other tips

All rashes look more pronounced when the skin is warm, so expect the rash to be more red and more prominent after playing outside, bathing, or when waking up in the morning after being under covers.

Return to school

Your child can return to school as soon as they feel better (and are fever free), even if the rash is still present. The rash means they are no longer contagious.

When to call

- Rash changes to hives. If you've never seen hives, photos may be helpful so you can recognize them. Click [here](#) or scan to see photos.
- Rash becomes itchy
- Rash lasts more than 6 days
- You think your child needs to be seen or they become worse



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