

Erythema Multiforme Rash

Erythema multiforme is a skin reaction that causes a rash made up of spots that often look like a target or “bullseye.” The spots usually have:

- A darker center
- A lighter ring
- A red outer ring

Some spots may have a small blister or scab in the center. Though it can look very concerning, most cases are mild and go away on their own.

What Are the Signs & Symptoms?

It often starts as red or pink spots that **grow over a few days into the classic “target” shape**. The rash **usually starts on the hands, feet, arms, or legs**. It may spread to the face or body. It appears on both sides of the body. It **may not bother your child at all** or may itch, burn, or feel uncomfortable. Some children may also have mild fever, tiredness, muscle or joint aches, swelling of hands or feet. If the rash involves the mouth or lips, it may be a more involved form and should be evaluated.



<https://kidshealth.org/>

What Causes Erythema Multiforme?

Erythema multiforme is **usually caused by the body reacting to something, most often an infection**. Common triggers include Herpes Simplex Virus (HSV = cold sore virus), viral infections, and certain medications (less common). Sometimes, the exact cause is not identified.

Is It Contagious?

The rash itself is NOT contagious, and it cannot spread from person to person. If a virus triggered the rash, the virus could spread—but most children who get the virus do NOT develop the same rash. **It is okay to go to school as long as fever-free for 24 hours without medication and feeling well enough to participate.**

How Is It Diagnosed and Treated?

Testing is usually not needed, and a diagnosis is made by looking at the rash and reviewing the history. **It usually goes away on its own within 1–3 weeks and treatment focuses on helping your child feel more comfortable.** Comfort measures can include cool compresses/baths/showers, pain/fever relievers such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen, antihistamines such as Zyrtec (cetirizine) for itching, and soothing lotions or creams. Reference our [PAA Medication Guides](#).



When Should I Call PAA:

- Sores in the mouth or lips
- Rash near or involving the eyes
- Trouble drinking fluids
- Significant pain
- Skin peeling or worsening rash
- Symptoms that are not improving after 2–3 weeks

What Else Should I Know?

- The rash usually goes away in 1–3 weeks (sometimes up to 4 weeks)
- It does not cause scarring
- The skin may look darker in those areas for a few months after healing
- The rash does not usually reoccur (unless it was triggered by the HSV “cold sore” virus – for these recurrent cases, we treat with antiviral medications)