

URTICARIA (HIVES)

What is urticaria?

Urticaria (also known as hives) are puffy raised spots that can happen anywhere on the skin. They can be small or large bumps and are usually quite itchy. If you draw a circle around urticaria, you will usually find that the urticaria will change in about 24 hours. (It can move, fade or change shape). However, your child will often get more urticaria in other parts of the body. It's also quite common to get swollen and puffy hands and feet with urticaria.

There is a special type of urticaria called "dermatographism" where you can literally write on the skin. When you scratch or rub the skin (this is the writing part), the lines that are scratched will get puffy. These marks usually go away within an hour.



What causes urticaria?

There are many causes of urticaria. In young children, the most common trigger is an infection, which shows up as a cough, runny nose, fever, diarrhea or sometimes with very little symptoms, aside from the urticaria. Other triggers are medications and food. Less commonly, exercise, stress, sunlight and contact with the cold can also trigger urticaria.



How long does this last for?

In most children, the outbreak of urticaria lasts for less than 2 weeks. However, it can last longer. If your child continues to have more urticaria for over 6 weeks, this is called "chronic" (or long-term) urticaria.

How do you treat urticaria?

The most important thing in urticaria is figuring out the trigger. If the trigger is an infection or if there is no obvious trigger, the urticaria will usually go away by itself with time. If the urticaria is itchy, you can use non-drowsy over-the-counter antihistamines like loratadine (Aerius or Aerius kids), cetirizine (Reactine or Reactine kids) or loratadine (Claritin or Claritin kids) or prescription antihistamines like rupatadine (Rupall). These medications work best if they are taken on a regular schedule so they can suppress the urticaria before it pops up on the skin.

When to worry

If you have any swelling or tingling of the mouth or tongue, trouble breathing, trouble swallowing or throwing up with the hives, this could be the sign of a more serious reaction called anaphylaxis. If you think this is happening, go to your local emergency department.