

# CARING FOR YOUR CHILD WITH ROSEOLA



Roseola is a viral infection, usually not serious. The infection occurs most often in children from 6 months to 3 years old. It's rare after the age of 5.

The cause is a herpesvirus. The illness spreads when droplets from an infected person's mouth get into the air by talking, sneezing, or coughing, and other people breathe in the droplets. Someone without symptoms often spreads the illness.



## What Is Roseola?

Roseola is an infection caused by a virus. Other names for this common illness of small children are exanthem subitum and sixth disease. Roseola is generally not serious and isn't any special risk for pregnant women. The infection occurs most often in children from 6 months to 3 years old. It's rare after the age of 5 years.

## What Causes Roseola?

Roseola is caused by a herpesvirus. This virus is from the same family of viruses that cause cold sores, shingles, and genital herpes, but it's not the same one. The illness spreads when droplets from an infected person's mouth get into the air by talking, sneezing, or coughing. Then, someone breathes in the droplets. Someone without symptoms often spreads the illness.

## What Are the Symptoms of Roseola?

The illness begins with a sudden fever. The child may have a very high temperature, up to 105° F. Even with the high temperature, however, the child usually doesn't look or act very sick. The fever will last from 2 to 5 days, but most often it lasts for 3 or 4 days. Other symptoms are being fussy, having less appetite, and swelling of the neck glands. One or 2 days after the fever stops, the child will break out in a rash. The rash is rose pink and blotchy. It starts first on the chest and upper back, and then spreads to the arms and neck. At this point, with the fever gone, the child acts completely well.



The illness begins with a sudden fever. A very high temperature, up to 105° F, can occur. A child usually doesn't look or act very sick. Then a rash appears, and the fever goes away. The rash, rose pink and blotchy, starts on the chest and upper back and spreads to the arms and neck.

## How Is Roseola Diagnosed?

A health care provider will diagnose roseola on the basis of a medical history and physical examination. Blood tests are not usually needed.

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No specific treatment is needed. Make your child more comfortable by lowering the fever with acetaminophen or ibuprofen. Don't use ice, cold water, or alcohol rubs.

Because roseola is a viral infection, you can't make the rash go away faster. Don't put cortisone creams, calamine lotion, or petroleum jelly (Vaseline®) on the rash.



Don't give aspirin to children with viral infections because of the dangerous Reye's syndrome that occurs with aspirin use.



Call your health care provider if your child becomes more ill, acts as if there's pain, or doesn't eat or drink fairly normally. Your child may have another virus or very rare complication.

## How Is Roseola Treated?

Because this common childhood illness is caused by a virus, no specific treatment is needed. Make the child more comfortable by lowering the fever with acetaminophen or children's ibuprofen. Other things that can be done for fever are to give the child lukewarm baths, have the child wear lightweight clothing, keep the child quiet, and give the child cool drinks. Don't use ice, cold water, or alcohol rubs. Because of the rapid start of the fever, sometimes a child may have what is called a febrile convulsion (or seizure). In a seizure, the child may be unconscious or have twitching of the arms, legs, or face. If a seizure occurs, contact the health care provider immediately.

## DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Roseola:

- ✓ **DO** treat your child as normally as possible, because this illness is generally mild. Nothing can be done to make the illness go away faster. The child doesn't need a special diet.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if the illness doesn't follow the usual course.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if your child becomes more ill, acts as if there's pain, or doesn't eat or drink fairly normally. Your child may have another virus or very rare complication.
- ⊗ **DON'T** put cortisone creams, calamine lotion, or petroleum jelly (Vaseline®) on the rash. Acetaminophen or children's ibuprofen can help your child feel more comfortable.
- ⊗ **DON'T** give aspirin to children with viral infections because of the dangerous Reye's syndrome that occurs with aspirin use in children.

## FROM THE DESK OF

### NOTES

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

### Contact the following source:

- American Academy of Dermatology  
Tel: (847) 330-0230, (866) 503-7546  
Website: <http://www.aad.org>