



Rashes

Rashes are very common in children and babies. Most rashes are caused by common viral infections, and are nothing to be worried about. Usually, rashes are harmless and will go away on their own.

Sometimes different viruses can cause rashes that look the same, while some viruses cause rashes that look quite unique.

Measles is a virus that causes a distinctive rash. Measles is very contagious and can be serious. If you think your child has measles, see your GP.

If your child has a rash of small, bright-red or purple spots or bruises that do not turn white (blanch) when you press on them, seek urgent medical attention.

Signs and symptoms

Rashes can have many different appearances: red, flat areas; raised bumps; blisters; welts; or any combination of these. It can be common for the rash to spread to most or all of the body before it goes away. The rash may last for days to weeks.

Most rashes are mild and do not cause your child any distress, although some rashes can cause a lot of itching.

Some rashes are quite distinctive. For more information about viruses that cause a rash, see our fact sheets:

- [Chickenpox \(https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Chickenpox/\)](https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Chickenpox/)
- [Hand, foot and mouth disease \(https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Hand_foot_and_mouth_disease/\)](https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Hand_foot_and_mouth_disease/)
- [Henoch-Schönlein purpura \(https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Henoch_Schonlein_Purpura_HSP/\)](https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Henoch_Schonlein_Purpura_HSP/), (http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Hives/)
- [Measles \(https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Measles/\)](https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Measles/)
- [Molluscum \(https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Molluscum/\)](https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Molluscum/)
- [Roseola infantum \(http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Roseola_infantum/\)](http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Roseola_infantum/)
- [Slapped cheek \(fifth disease\) \(https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Slapped_cheek_fifth_disease/\)](https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Slapped_cheek_fifth_disease/)

When to see a doctor

Often the viral infection causing the rash will also cause your child to have a fever (see our fact sheet [Fever in children \(https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Fever_in_children/\)](https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Fever_in_children/)). The fever often happens at the start of the illness, before the rash appears. When the rash appears, it means your child is getting better. However, if your child has a fever with their rash, take them to see your GP.

Measles can be dangerous, especially for young children and babies. If you think that your child might have measles, see your GP. Ask if your doctor can visit your child at home, or if you visit a medical clinic, tell the receptionist as soon as you arrive, to avoid spreading the infection to others.

If your child has a rash of small, bright-red or purple spots or bruises that do not turn white (blanch) when you push on them, along with a fever, headache, stiff neck or back pain, seek medical advice immediately from your GP or nearest hospital emergency department. See our fact sheet [Meningococcal infection \(http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Meningococcal_infection/\)](http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Meningococcal_infection/).

Care at home

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In nearly all cases, it is not important to know which virus is causing the rash. Most rashes will get better on their own. Antibiotics do not work on viruses and are not given to children with rashes caused by viral infections.

If your child's rash is itchy, talk to your local pharmacist about treatments that can help relieve the itch.

You can make your child feel more comfortable if the virus associated with the rash is making your child feel miserable. See our fact sheet [Pain relief for children](https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Pain_relief_for_children/) (https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Pain_relief_for_children/).

How are viral infections spread?

Viruses are spread by direct contact. The best way to prevent spreading and catching viruses is to wash your hands after touching any bodily fluid and avoid sharing items like cutlery, drinking cups, towels, toothbrushes and clothing.

Key points to remember

- Rashes caused by viruses are very common in children and babies.
- Most viral rashes are harmless and will go away on their own.
- If you are concerned your child has measles, see a doctor.
- If your child has a fever and a rash that does not turn white (blanch) when pressed or they are very unwell, seek emergency medical care.

For more information

- Kids Health Info fact sheet: [Measles](https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Measles/) (https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Measles/)
- Kids Health Info fact sheet: [Chickenpox](https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Chickenpox/) (https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Chickenpox/)
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- Kids Health Info fact sheet: [Roseola infantum](http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Roseola_infantum/) ([http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Roseola infantum/](http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Roseola_infantum/))
- Kids Health Info fact sheet: [Slapped cheek \(fifth disease\)](https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Slapped_cheek_fifth_disease/) ([https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Slapped cheek fifth disease/](https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Slapped_cheek_fifth_disease/))
- Kids Health Info fact sheet: [Meningococcal infection](http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Meningococcal_infection/) ([http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Meningococcal infection/](http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Meningococcal_infection/))
- Kids Health Info fact sheet: [Viral illnesses](https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Viral_illnesses/) ([https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Viral illnesses/](https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Viral_illnesses/))
- Kids Health Info fact sheet: [Hives](http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Hives/) (http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Hives/)
- Kids Health Info fact sheet: [Fever in children](https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Fever_in_children/) ([https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Fever in children/](https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Fever_in_children/))
- Kids Health Info fact sheet: [Pain relief for children](https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Pain_relief_for_children/) ([https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Pain relief for children/](https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Pain_relief_for_children/))
- See your GP or Maternal and Child Health Nurse.

Common questions our doctors are asked

Do I need to take my child to the doctor every time she has a rash?

No, if your child has a mild illness – like the common cold – and they are otherwise happy and eating and drinking, then the presence of a slight rash is not concerning.

My child has a rash and I am pregnant. Should I be worried?

Some viral infections can cause problems in early pregnancy. If you are pregnant, and your child has a rash and you are concerned, you should see your local doctor or obstetrician for advice.

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