

Fact Sheet

Roseola

What is roseola?

Roseola is a common childhood illness caused by a virus. It is usually mild and mainly affects children between 6 months and 2 years of age.

How is roseola spread?

Roseola is spread through saliva and tiny droplets of fluid from the nose and throat of infected people when they talk, laugh, cough, or sneeze. It is not known how long children with roseola may be contagious to others.

What are the symptoms of roseola?

A child with roseola has a fever and their temperature rises suddenly, sometimes higher than 39.5°C (103° F). The rapid rise in temperature may cause a febrile seizure (also known as a fever seizure). Although a seizure can be very scary, it should only last a few minutes, and does not do any harm. Your child's temperature should return to normal within 3 to 5 days.

About 24 hours after the fever leaves, the rash develops. Small pink or red dots appear on the neck, chest, and body. The rash may last for up to 2 days. One of the key features of roseola is that the rash appears after the fever has ended. In most other childhood illnesses, the fever and the rash happen at the same time.

Some children have other symptoms such as a runny nose, diarrhea, vomiting, and swollen glands in the neck.

How do you know you have roseola?

Your health care provider can confirm a diagnosis of roseola by the telltale rash or, in some cases, by a blood test.

What is the treatment?

Most children recover fully from roseola within a week of the onset of the fever. With your health care provider's advice, you can give your child over-the-counter medications to reduce fever, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol, others) or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, others). Do not give aspirin to children or teenagers.

Antibiotics are not effective in treating viral illnesses such as roseola.

Can roseola be prevented?

There is no vaccine to prevent roseola. If your child is sick with roseola, keep him or her home and away from other children until the fever has broken.

Most people have antibodies to roseola by the time they're of school age, making them immune to a second infection. Even so, if one household member contracts the virus, make sure that all family members wash their hands frequently to prevent spread of the virus to anyone who isn't immune.