

Roseola

What is roseola?

Roseola is a common illness caused by a virus. Only infants and young children get roseola, usually when they are between 6 months and 2 years old. Roseola normally appears in the spring and autumn seasons.

Is roseola serious?

The experts say that about 3 out of every 10 children catch roseola. When they do, the disease is usually mild. Doctors think that many children get roseola and recover from it without anyone knowing, because they never feel or act sick.

What are the symptoms?

Roseola is usually easy to diagnose. First, the infant's or child's temperature rises quickly, sometimes to as high as 40°C (104° F).

Roseola can sometimes cause high temperatures. In those few cases where it rises much above 40°C (104° F) the child may have seizures or convulsions. Although these fits can be scary for parents, they rarely cause any permanent damage.

Unlike other infections, there are no other symptoms, like diarrhea, throwing up, coughing, or a runny nose.

Although affected infants and toddlers will often go back and forth between feeling comfortable and acting upset, they will usually eat and drink fairly normally.

Within 3 to 5 days their temperature should drop back to normal, and within 24 hours after that the roseola rash will develop. This pink or red rash appears on the neck, chest, and body and consists of small pink dots.

Sometimes this rash is so faint you can hardly see it. In other cases, it can be very obvious. In either case, this rash usually lasts about a day.

One of the key features of roseola is that the rash appears *after* the fever has ended. In most other childhood diseases the fever and the rash happen at the same time.

How does roseola spread?

Roseola does not seem to spread very easily from one person to another. In fact, doctors do not know exactly how the disease is spread, or how long it takes to become sick after a child has been exposed to the disease.

They think that children are probably contagious from a few days before the fever until the rash appears.

Be careful of any high fever

You should always call your doctor if you feel concerned or frightened about your child's illness. If your child does have convulsions, **call your doctor immediately.**

If you are alone when this happens, turn the baby on his or her side **before** making the phone call. This will make sure that the tongue doesn't block proper breathing. **Do not** leave your child unattended. If you don't have a cell phone or a portable, make sure the child is nearby while you make the call.

If this is the first time your baby has had convulsions, and you cannot reach your doctor, take your baby to the nearest emergency room. The doctor will want to find out the cause of the fever to make sure that a more serious illness is not present.

These convulsions can be very scary, but they should not last more than a few minutes.

Fever does not cause brain damage, even if it lasts for several days. As long as your child is acting normally, even a fairly high fever is nothing to worry about. You can't be sure your baby has roseola until the fever goes away and the tell-tale rash appears. If your child seems to be getting sicker, has a fever above 41°C (106°F), is extremely sleepy, listless or irritable, or has a stiff neck, call your doctor right away, because these symptoms may indicate a more serious illness.

What treatment is best?

The best thing for your child is to bring the fever down. Clothing should be kept light: T - shirt and shorts or a diaper. As long as the temperature is high you should give your child acetaminophen, four times a day. Do **NOT** give acetylsalicylic acid – ASA or Aspirin® — to children.

If the temperature reaches 40°C (104°F) you can help your child become cooler by sponging him or her with a washcloth soaked in cool (but not cold) water. Fever dries out the body, so encourage your child to drink lots of fluids. Food is less important. If the child is hungry, then eating is fine; if there is no appetite, then meals can safely be missed for the few days that any fever lasts.

There is no specific treatment for roseola. All you can do is keep your child comfortable, treat the fever, and wait for the disease to run its course. Any child with roseola should rest in bed until the fever is gone.

Antibiotics cannot cure the disease. If your doctor does prescribe them, it means that the fever might be caused by a bacterial illness.

Getting back to normal

Your child can go back to social activities such as daycare and visiting the playground as soon as the fever is gone and the rash has disappeared. If your child is recovering from roseola and is returning to daycare, tell the caregivers there about the recent illness.

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