

Roseola infantum

Roseola infantum, more often referred to simply as roseola, is one of the very common mild viral illnesses that can cause a temperature and rash in babies and young children (aged between six months and three years).

Roseola develops around five to 15 days after contact and usually doesn't cause problems for the child, although sometimes it can make the child feel unwell. The high temperature and fine, raised, red skin rash can last from a few hours to three to five days. Roseola is also known as sixth disease or exanthema subitum.

Symptoms of roseola

The symptoms include:

- The child develops a high temperature of up to 40°C (possibly higher), which usually lasts for a few hours, but may last three to five days.
- As the temperature falls, a raised, red rash appears – first on the body and neck, and later on the face, arms and legs.
- The rash lasts from a few hours to one or two days.
- Roseola may also cause a fever without the rash.
- Children with roseola recover fully, usually within a week.

Roseola is a member of the herpes family

Roseola is caused by one of the viruses in the herpes group, but this virus can't cause other herpes infections, such as cold sores. It is not known how the virus is spread, although spread via saliva is suspected. Roseola is most infectious while the child is unwell – from the start of the fever and including the time before the rash appears. Most children have been in contact with this virus by the time they are three years old.

Treatment for roseola

Treatment for roseola includes:

- Treat a fever over 38.5°C with paracetamol, following dosage instructions for your child's age and weight.
- Offer the child lots of water and drinks.
- It is best to keep any unwell child home from childcare or creche for two good reasons: the sick child needs extra attention, and the other children at the childcare centre or creche shouldn't be exposed to the infection.

Complications of roseola

Roseola usually doesn't cause any problems. Some of the complications may include:

- The rash can sometimes be confused with measles or rubella.
- Sometimes, roseola can lead to ear infections.
- The major problem is the possibility of febrile convulsions (fits triggered by a high fever), as the child's temperature may rise very quickly. They rarely cause any ongoing problems.

Other complications of roseola are very uncommon.

See your doctor

If you are concerned about your child, always see your doctor for information, advice and treatment. You should also see your doctor if you are pregnant and your child, or someone else who you are in close contact with, has a rash illness. This is to make sure that you are not at risk of rubella infection or parvovirus B19 infection, as these can be difficult to distinguish from roseola without laboratory tests.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Maternal and child health nurse
- Pharmacist
- The Maternal and Child Health Line is available 24 hours a day Tel. 132 229.

Things to remember

- Roseola is one of the very common mild viral illnesses that affect children aged between six months and three years.
- The fine, raised, red skin rash and high temperature can last from a few hours to three to five days.
- The rash can sometimes be confused with measles or rubella.
- The major problem that may occur as a result of roseola is the risk of febrile convulsions triggered by the fever.
- Treatment options include plenty of fluids, paracetamol, rest and care at home.

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Better Health Channel

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