

Heat Rash (Miliaria)

What is heat rash?

Heat rash is a skin rash that usually occurs on the back, neck, or chest. The rash looks like tiny, pink bumps. Occasionally, some are pinpoint-size water blisters. The rash can be itchy or feel prickly. Heat rash is sometimes called "prickly heat."

What is the cause?

Heat rash is caused by blocked-off sweat glands. Lots of children get it during hot, humid weather when sweat glands are overworked. Infants can also get it in the wintertime with fever, overdressing, or ointments applied to the chest for coughs (ointments block off the sweat glands). Older children can get it with exercise.

How long does it last?

With treatment, heat rash usually clears up completely in 2 to 3 days.

How can I take care of my child?

- **Cooling:** Use techniques that cool off the skin:
 - Give cool baths every 2 to 3 hours, without soap. Let the skin air-dry.
 - For localized rashes, apply a cool, wet washcloth to the area for 5 to 10 minutes.
 - Dress your child in as few layers of clothing as possible.
 - Lower the temperature in your home or use a fan when your child is asleep.
 - Have the child lie on a cotton towel to absorb perspiration.
- **Hydrocortisone cream:** Apply 1% hydrocortisone cream (no prescription necessary) 3 times a day to itchy spots. Avoid hydrocortisone ointments. Calamine lotion is another option.
- **Avoid ointments:** Avoid all ointments or oils because they can block off sweat glands. Be sure the rash isn't caused by a mentholated ointment being used for a cough.

When should I call my child's health care provider?

Call during office hours if:

- The rash lasts more than 3 days on this treatment.
- You have other concerns or questions.

Written by B.D. Schmitt, M.D., author of "Your Child's Health," Bantam Books.

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