

Patient information: Roseola (The Basics)

Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate

What is roseola? — Roseola is a common illness in children younger than 2 years. It causes a fever that lasts 3 to 5 days and then a rash. Roseola can be alarming to parents, because it can cause a high fever. But usually, the condition is not serious and goes away without treatment.

What are the symptoms of roseola? — The main symptoms of roseola are:

- Fever
 - Might get as high as 104°F (40°C) or above
 - Lasts 3 to 5 days
- Rash ([picture 1](#))
 - Starts as the fever is going away
 - Shows up first on the neck, chest, and belly, then spreads to the face, arms, and legs
 - Is pinkish-red in color
 - Normally does not itch
 - Lasts for 1 to 2 days in most children, but might come and go within 2 to 4 hours

Despite the fever and rash, most children with roseola do not seem sick. Still, some children have other symptoms such as:

- Being tired
- Being fussy
- Not being hungry
- Swollen eyelids
- Swelling in the neck or behind the ears

Is there anything I can do on my own to help my child? — When your child has a fever you can do the following:

- Offer him or her lots of fluids to drink. Call the doctor or nurse if your child won't or can't drink fluids for more than a few hours.
- Encourage your child to rest as much as he or she wants.

Medicines such as [acetaminophen](#) (sample brand name: Tylenol) or [ibuprofen](#) (sample brand names: Advil, Motrin) can help bring down a fever. But children don't usually need medicine for a fever unless they are uncomfortable. Check with your doctor or nurse about giving medicine for a fever.

NEVER give your child [aspirin](#). Aspirin can cause a dangerous condition called Reye syndrome in children under 18 years.

Should my child see a doctor or nurse? — You should take your child to see the doctor or nurse if he or she is:

- Younger than 3 months and has a rectal temperature of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher. Any infant with a fever this high

should see a doctor or nurse even if he or she looks normal or seems fine.

- Between 3 and 36 months and has a rectal temperature of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher for more than 3 days. Go right away if your child seems sick or is fussy, clingy, or refuses to drink fluids.
- Between 3 and 36 months old and has a rectal temperature of 102°F (38.9°C) or higher.

Children of any age should also see a doctor or nurse if they have:

- Oral, rectal, ear, or forehead temperature of 104°F (40°C) or higher
- Armpit temperature of 103°F (39.4°C) or higher
- A seizure caused by a fever
- Fevers that keep coming back, even if they last only a few hours
- A fever as well as an ongoing medical problem, such as heart disease, cancer, lupus, or sickle cell anemia
- A fever as well as a new skin rash

Will my child need tests? — Probably not. The doctor or nurse will probably be able to tell if your child has roseola by learning about his or her symptoms and doing an exam.

How is roseola treated? — There is no treatment for roseola. The condition usually goes away on its own. But some children get medicines to bring down their fever.

More on this topic

[Patient information: Fever in children \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient information: Giving your child over-the-counter medicines \(The Basics\)](#)

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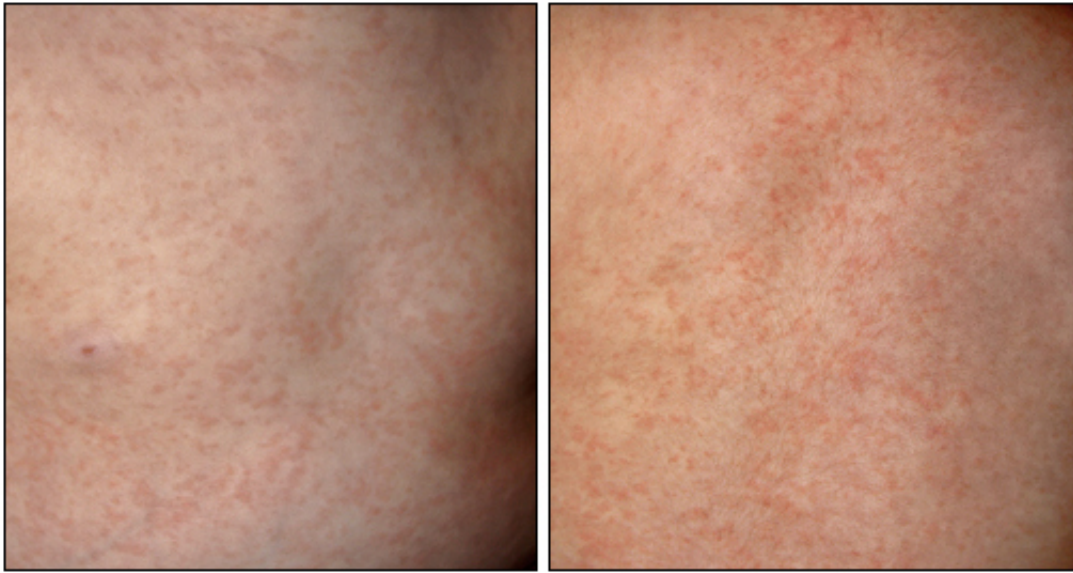
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GRAPHICS

Roseola rash



The roseola rash starts as the fever goes away. It shows up first on the neck, chest, and belly and then spreads to the arms, legs, and face.

Courtesy of Michael Brady, MD.

Graphic 76269 Version 1.0