



Royal Berkshire
NHS Foundation Trust

Urticaria (hives)

A guide for parents & carers

This leaflet explains what urticaria is and how it is managed. If you do not understand anything or have any questions please ask your nurse or doctor.

What is urticaria?

Urticaria, also known as hives, is an itchy blotchy rash that looks like a nettle sting. Some people also get swelling of their skin, lips and around the eyes. This is called angioedema (angy-o-dema).

What causes it?

Urticaria is very common. It can sometimes be caused by allergies, dust, pollen and pets or foods like eggs, milk, fish and nuts. If it is caused by one of these the rash would appear soon after contact with the allergen.

Not all hives are caused by allergies. Many people are troubled by urticaria without any obvious cause.

The sudden appearance of an urticarial rash for several days is often due to an infection with a virus. If the rash continues for more than six weeks the condition is known as chronic urticaria.

Chronic urticaria

Chronic urticaria is a common condition. It can sometimes be a problem and get in the way of daily activities. Some people find that their rash can be caused by:

- Heat, bathing in hot water.
- Cold, weather and water.
- Pressure, after sitting for a long time.

– Emotion, this is known as cholinergic (ko-lin-ergic) urticaria.

Recent studies have shown that in many people the rash can be caused by a type of autoimmune disease (a problem with the body's immune system).

What is the treatment for chronic urticaria?

There is no cure. Many children have the rashes for six months to a year. The doctor may take some blood tests to look for conditions that can make urticaria worse.

The rash can be controlled by taking antihistamine medicines every day. Antihistamines do not have long-term side effects and are not addictive. Even if you take them for a long time your child will not become "immune" (no longer have an affect) to them. Sometimes a high dose of these medicines is needed to control the symptoms.

Managing urticaria long-term

Chronic urticaria is a long term condition. Most people have symptoms for about six months but they can continue for one or two years. About half of sufferers will have other episodes in the future.

Clinic appointments

We often ask food allergy patients to stop taking their antihistamines before coming to clinic. This advice does not apply to your child.

If your child has chronic urticaria and needs to take antihistamines every day do not stop antihistamines before your child's clinic appointment.

Contact numbers

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Children's Clinic on 0118 322 8142

For more information on the Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

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This document can be made available in other languages and formats upon request.

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