



## Hives (Urticaria)

### What are hives?

Hives, or urticaria, are raised swellings of the skin or mucous membranes. The raised swelling is called a wheal, or a “welt.” A red ring surrounds the wheal. This is called the flair. The size of each hive may vary greatly, from a tiny spot to a swollen, red area several inches in diameter. The hives may cover just one small area or cover large area of the body. In infants and young children, hives may cause swelling of the arms and legs. Hives may come, go, and then come back again on another area of the body. Hives can be very itchy. Most hives occur suddenly and then go away completely.

Hives are usually not serious and go away with minimal treatment. Sometimes, the reaction may be more severe.

If the face, lips, tongue or throat swell, there may be wheezing or difficulty breathing. This can be life-threatening. If it happens, **call 9-1-1 for transportation to a hospital.**

### What causes them?

The most common cause of hives is an allergy to foods and drugs. Other causes are infections, immunizations, insect bites or inhaled allergens. Heat, cold or stress can cause hives. In some children, pressure on the skin, sunlight or sweating during exercise can cause hives. The exact cause of hives cannot be identified in most children. Write down everything that was eaten (food, liquids, medicines, candy, etc.) in the past 24 to 48 hours. This may help find a cause if the hives come back at another time.

### How long do they last?

A single hive rarely lasts more than 12 to 48 hours. Hives caused by a food or drug reaction generally last a few days to several weeks. Some children have chronic hives, which means the hives have lasted for more than six weeks. Chronic hives may occur on and off from several months to several years. Hives caused by viral illnesses normally come and go for three or 4 days, then disappear. Some hives may come and go for as long as several weeks to months.

---

## How are hives treated?

Treatment works better if the cause of the hives is found and eliminated. Treatment may include:

- **Antihistamines** such as Benadryl® relieve the hives and itching for most children. To prevent the return of hives, antihistamines are often continued for one to two weeks after the hives are gone.
- **Corticosteroids** may be given if your child does not get relief from antihistamines.
- **Epinephrine** may be given as a shot to give fast relief of acute, severe hives or problems breathing.
- For hives possibly caused by pollens, animal contact or playing in the grass or weeds, give your child a shower or bath. Wash all clothing your child was wearing at the time.

**ALERT:** Call your child's doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any questions or concerns or if your child has special health care needs that were not covered by this information.

**This teaching sheet is meant to provide you with additional information about your child's care. Diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up should be provided by your health care professional.**