

Viral Exanthem

What is a viral exanthem?

An exanthem is a doctor's word for a rash caused by an infectious organism. In this case, a viral exanthem is a rash caused by a virus. You may be familiar with some viral exanthems and you undoubtedly have had some yourself. One familiar viral exanthem is chickenpox. Other viral exanthems include measles and rubella, for which most people have been immunized against.

While measles and rubella may sound unpleasant, the vast majority of the hundreds of other viral exanthems are harmless, yet they may cause short-term discomfort. Just as adults may get colds and experience uncomfortable, yet tolerable symptoms like a runny nose, sore throat, and coughing, viral exanthem's symptoms include itching and redness and are also uncomfortable, but usually short-lived. They very rarely have emotional, developmental, or physical aftereffects.

What are the symptoms of a viral exanthem?

The most obvious symptom is the widespread rash, which may be anywhere over the body's surface. Some viral exanthems have particular patterns that help us with diagnosing their cause. Other rashes may appear random. The rash may itch or it may not. Other symptoms may occur prior to or with the rash; fever, a tired achy feeling, irritability, loss of appetite, headache, and abdominal pain.

What is the treatment for a viral exanthem?

The treatment is symptom control and patience. You may benefit from an oral or topical antihistamine, or another topical anti-itch medication, as determined by the nature and extent of your problem. Fever and muscle aches may be controlled by over-the-counter fever medications like acetaminophin (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Motrin). Patience is important as the rash will likely disappear in a few days to a week as mysteriously as it appeared. Usually by the time you develop the rash, you are no longer contagious, but it is important for you to avoid contact with pregnant women or patients with a weakened immune system. If on the very rare occasion, you develop a rising fever or your symptoms worsen it is important for you to contact the office as soon as possible.