

Heat Rash (Miliaria Rubra)

Heat rash is a common skin rash that occurs when there is increased sweating under warm, humid conditions. It is caused by blockage of the sweat glands. It most commonly appears as small red bumps, sometimes looking like little blisters, within the skin. The skin may feel prickly when touched. The rash most commonly develops on the neck, upper chest, and back and in skin folds. Heat rash usually clears by keeping the affected area cooler.

What is heat rash?

There are a few types of heat rash, but the most common is called miliaria rubra, or “prickly heat.” It occurs when there is a lot of sweating and blockage of the sweat glands. This most often occurs during hot weather. However, it can also result from being overdressed, especially in babies, or from fevers. Miliaria rubra is a harmless rash that clears up quickly.

What does it look like?

- Little red bumps appear on the skin, sometimes looking like small blisters or pimples. The skin often feels prickly when touched.
- The rash may be a little itchy—but otherwise, there are no other symptoms.
- The rash most commonly occurs in body creases or places where clothes rub up against the skin. Common sites include the neck, diaper area, armpit, upper back, and chest.
- Another form of heat rash, called “miliaria crystallina,” occurs most often in newborns. This rash looks like tiny, clear blisters (not red) that break easily.

- Heat rash goes away within a few days, especially after keeping the area cooler.

What increases your child’s risk of heat rash?

- Excessive exposure to high temperatures and humidity.
- Wearing too many heavy clothes for the weather (even on cold days).

How is heat rash treated?

- Usually, cooling your child down is all the treatment needed. On hot days, get your child out of the heat and into an air-conditioned room, if possible. Remove any excess clothing. A cool compress (a washcloth soaked in cool water) can be helpful.
- No need to put anything on the skin—for example, lotions or creams. These may actually make the rash worse by contributing to blockage of the sweat glands.
- The rash should clear up within a few days. If not, call our office.

When should I call your office?

Call our office if:

- Heat rash doesn’t clear up within a few days.
- Your child has repeated episodes of heat rash.

Other conditions can cause a rash similar to heat rash. Call our office if your child has other symptoms, including fever, or just “acts sick.”