

# Hives

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## Symptoms

- Raised pink [bumps](#) with pale centers (welts)
- Hives look like mosquito bites
- Sizes of hives vary from ½ inch (12 mm) to several inches (cm) across
- Shapes of hives are variable and change repeatedly
- Itchy rash

## Causes

- Widespread hives usually are caused by a viral infection. Can also be an [allergic reaction](#) to a food, drug, infection, insect bite, or other substances. Often, the cause is not found. Hives from foods usually resolve in 6 hours.
- Localized hives are usually due to skin contact with plants, pollen, food or pet saliva. Localized hives are not caused by drugs, infections or swallowed foods.

## Care Advice

1. Localized Hives:
  - a. For localized hives, wash the allergic substance off the skin with soap and water.
  - b. If itchy, massage the area with a cold pack or ice for 20 minutes.
  - c. Localized hives usually disappear in a few hours and don't need Benadryl.
2. **BENADRYL** for Widespread Hives:
  - a. Give Benadryl 4 times per day for widespread hives that itch (no prescription needed).
  - b. If you only have another antihistamine at home (but not Benadryl), use that.
  - c. Continue the Benadryl 4 times per day until the hives are gone for 12 hours.
  - d. Contraindication: Age is under 1 year (Reason: Benadryl is a sedative). Give your [doctor](#) a call for advice.
3. **FOOD-RELATED HIVES:**
  - a. Foods can cause widespread hives
  - b. Sometimes the hives are isolated to just around the mouth
  - c. Hives from foods usually are transient and gone in under 6 hours
4. **COOL BATH:** Give a cool bath for 10 minutes to relieve itching. (Caution: avoid causing a chill) Rub very itchy areas with an ice cube for 10 minutes.
5. **REMOVE ALLERGENS:** Give a bath or shower if triggered by pollens or animal contact. Change clothes.



6. **AVOID ALLERGENS:** If you identify a substance that causes hives (e.g., a food), help your child avoid that substance in the future.
7. **CONTAGIOUSNESS:**
  - a. Hives are not contagious.
  - b. Your child can return to child care or school if the hives do not interfere with normal activities.
  - c. If the hives are associated with an infection, your child can return to school after the fever is gone and your child feels well enough to participate in normal activities.
8. **Expected Course:** Hives from a viral illness normally come and go for 3 or 4 days, then disappear. Most children get hives once.

## When To Call

*Call 911 Now (your child may need an ambulance) If*

- Difficulty breathing or wheezing
- Hoarseness or cough with rapid onset
- Difficulty swallowing, drooling or slurred speech with rapid onset
- Severe life-threatening allergic reaction in the past to similar substance

*Call Your Doctor Now (night or day) If*

- Your child looks or acts very sick
- Hives began after a [bee sting](#), medicine or high-risk food (e.g., peanuts or fish) and no previous reactions
- Age under 1 year with widespread hives

*Call Your Doctor Within 24 Hours (between 8 am and 4 pm) If*

- You think your child needs to be seen
- Severe hives (eyes swollen shut, very itchy, etc.) not improved after 2nd dose of Benadryl
- Fever or joint swelling is present
- Abdominal pain or vomiting present

*Call Your Doctor During Weekday Office Hours If*

- You have other questions or concerns
- Hives interfere with school or normal activities after taking Benadryl every 6 hours for more than 24 hours
- Food suspected as cause
- Hives have occurred 3 or more times and cause is unknown



- Hives last over 1 week

*Adapted from The American Academy of Pediatrics (2011) at [www.healthychildren.org](http://www.healthychildren.org)*

