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HIVES

Hives, also called urticaria (yer-ti-CARE-ee-uh) or welts, are red, very itchy swollen areas of the skin. About 1 out of every 5 people have hives at some time in their lives. Hives often appear suddenly and in groups. They may appear in one place, go away after a short time, and then come back in another place. Hives can be made worse by scratching. Hives may last for several weeks in severe cases.

CAUSES OF HIVES

Hives are the body's response to an irritation (Picture 1). The cause may be *non-allergic* or *allergic*.

Non-allergic hives are the most common type of hives. Usually, the exact cause is unknown. Some causes of non-allergic hives are:

- Cold - cold water, cold weather, ice cubes
- Heat - having a fever, taking warm baths, or using a hot tub
- Sunlight - sunlamps or direct sunlight
- Pressure - skin that is rubbed very hard; tight-fitting clothes
- Emotions - stress
- Viruses

Allergic hives have a known cause, but are less common. Some causes of allergic hives are:

- Foods - any food, but especially eggs, nuts, or shellfish
- Medicines
- Animals
- Plants - grass and weeds
- Insects - stinging and biting insects
- Soaps - lotions and laundry detergents



Picture 1 Some of the things that can cause hives.

WHEN TO GET EMERGENCY HELP

- **If the child has trouble breathing or swallowing, get emergency treatment immediately. Call 9-1-1 or the emergency squad or go to the nearest emergency room or urgent care center.** (Breathing difficulty may begin with a sudden, dry cough.)

TREATMENT OF HIVES

- Antihistamines are often prescribed to relieve itching. There are many non-prescription medicines that can help. Ask your pharmacist or doctor to recommend a product. If these medicines aren't helpful, ask your doctor if a prescription antihistamine would be more helpful.
- Using a sunscreen lotion can help people who have hives caused by sunlight.
- Dress your child in loose-fitting clothes to relieve pressure hives.
- Cool compresses may help relieve itching. (Wet a washcloth or towel with cold water, wring it out, and place it on the child's hives.)
- Distraction, such as playing a game, singing a song, or reading to your child, helps keep the child's mind off the itching (Picture 2).
- If your child develops hives often, you should keep a record of events that happened just before breaking out. This will help the doctor find the cause.
- If you know what causes the hives, it is best to stay away from it in the future. It is important to avoid re-exposure. A more severe reaction may occur the next time.
- Adrenaline injections may be given by your doctor or nurse to treat severe hives that in the past have gone on to more severe reactions. Or your doctor may prescribe steroid medicine.



Picture 2 Play activities can help keep your child's mind off the itching.

Although hives can be very frustrating, they are not usually life-threatening. It is important for parents to stay calm so that the child does not become more anxious and uncomfortable.

WHEN TO CALL YOUR DOCTOR

Call your child's doctor if:

- The prescribed antihistamine medicine does not relieve the itching.
- The hives or itching becomes worse.
- Your child develops hives after being stung by an insect or after eating a certain food. He may need an EpiPen® to prevent a more serious reaction next time.

If you have any questions, please call Children's Hospital Allergy Clinic at (614) 722-5504, or
