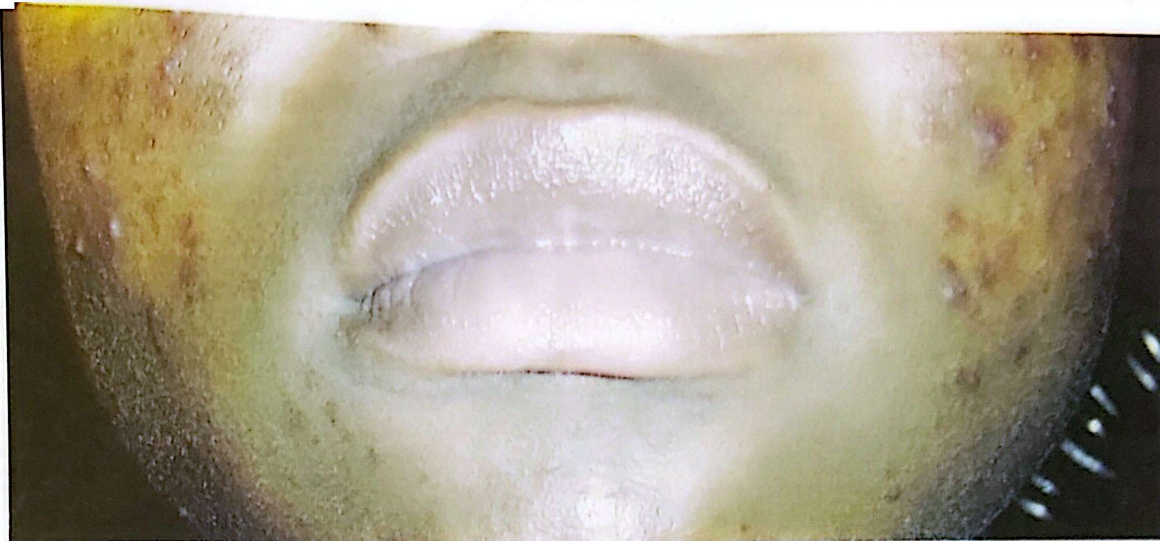




The cheeks and other parts of the face are some of the common areas of the body where one can get a heat rash. NET PHOTO

When you develop a heat rash

Changes in the weather have an impact on our bodies, for instance, the current dry season will bring about ailments such as heat rash.

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Weather has a huge effect on our skin. When it is too hot or dry, our skin lets us know. This dryness can lead to red patches and excess dead skin cells that clog pores causing acne. Now that the weather is hot, it is important to remember that anything that causes sweating is likely to cause you a heat rash.

Blocked sweat glands are the main cause of heat rash. They can get blocked for various reasons but the most common include: fever, tight clothing, heavy creams, oily lotions or adhesive bandages. All these can clog sweat ducts around the neck, armpit or groin.

According to Dr Edward Ogwang, a dermatologist at The Skin Specialist Clinic, a heat rash is a mild inflammation of clogged sweat duct, which occurs when the sweat ducts are blocked. The sweat cannot come to the skin surface to evaporate

hence becomes trapped under the skin. The rash is characterised by small, raised bumps spread evenly across small patches of the skin. The rash usually goes away on its own and resolves within hours or a few days.

Symptoms

When one develops a heat rash, they get a bumpy, itchy rash, skin burning, and a feeling like something is crawling on skin and the most common body parts affected are areas commonly exposed to the sun such as the hands, face, neck, and elbow folds. Heat rash may also affect areas covered by tight clothing such as the abdominal wall, groin, thigh creases, buttocks, and the area under the breasts.

The heat rash becomes severe when the sweat glands are blocked and the inflammation adds a red colour to the rash, which causes intense itching and burning symptoms.

During hot weather, some

Prevention

The sun screens never prevent heat rash but rather protect the skin from sun burn. In order to prevent heat rash, people should not exercise during times of extreme heat. Take frequent cooling breaks, drink plenty of fluids, and stop activities if you feel over-heated, lightheaded or dizzy. Dr Edward Ogwang also warns that, "People should desist from heavy clothing as they prevent evaporation of sweat; and from applying greasy substances such as vaseline on their skin because it blocks the skin pores thereby causing a heat rash." (To avoid sun burns, Dr Malik Ssemperera recommends a sun screen with a PH factor of 30 and above but one that is oil free to avoid clogging of skin pores.)

people experience a change in their skin complexion and become darker but Dr Ogwang says, "It is normal for the body to change its colour complexion especially the exposed body parts such as the face, arms and legs. This is because the body produces more melanin (skin pigment) to protect the body from the harmful ultra-violet sun rays." Extreme heat and humidity can also facilitate bacterial and fungal infections to the skin.

But there are other heat-related illnesses which include heat cramps, exhaustion, stroke and heat syncope.

Someone who experiences heat syncope (fainting) will experience the sudden onset of dizziness or fainting after exposure to high temperatures, particularly after exercising in the heat.

Who can get a heat rash?

Some situations can make heat rash more likely, for instance newborns or infants wearing diapers or tight-fitting clothes, elderly people who may not realise how much they are sweating

or do not frequently change their clothes, living in hot and humid climates, working in hot, confined spaces where sweat is prevalent.

Dr Malik Ssemperera, a dermatologist at Unity Skin Clinic, remarks: "Infants frequently get heat rash because their sweat glands are immature and they cannot get rid of the sweat they produce. This is common when children are overdressed, bundled up for cold weather, or have a fever."

Diagnosis is made by seeing the characteristic rash in certain common skin locations, especially after known heat exposure. A doctor usually makes the diagnosis with a visual examination of the rash.

However, complicated or atypical cases may need confirmation from skin culture, skin scrapings or biopsy.

Other skin conditions, which mimic a heat rash, include allergic reactions, bacterial infections, fungal infections and eczema.

Treatment

Heat rash is usually self-limited, meaning it resolves on its own without treatment. Over-the-counter treatments such as calamine, hydrocortisone cream, itch preparations (such as Benadryl spray), or sunburn lotions can be used to treat the itching and burning symptoms. Excessive use of heavy creams or lotions may make the heat rash worse.

"Occasionally the heat rash may get infected, especially if it has been scratched open and the bacteria can invade the skin and cause cellulitis infections. Symptoms such as redness, swelling, increased pain, fever, or pustules should be checked by your doctor. Antibiotic treatment with topical creams or medications taken by mouth may be necessary to treat infections associated with heat rash," says Dr Ogwang.

Keeping sweat glands from becoming clogged is the best way to prevent heat rash. Wear long-sleeved but loose-fitting and breathable clothing. Avoid exercising in hot, humid weather. Keep the skin dry, especially in areas like skin folds or creases where sweat can accumulate. Stay in a cool or air conditioned place whenever possible if you are prone to heat rash.



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