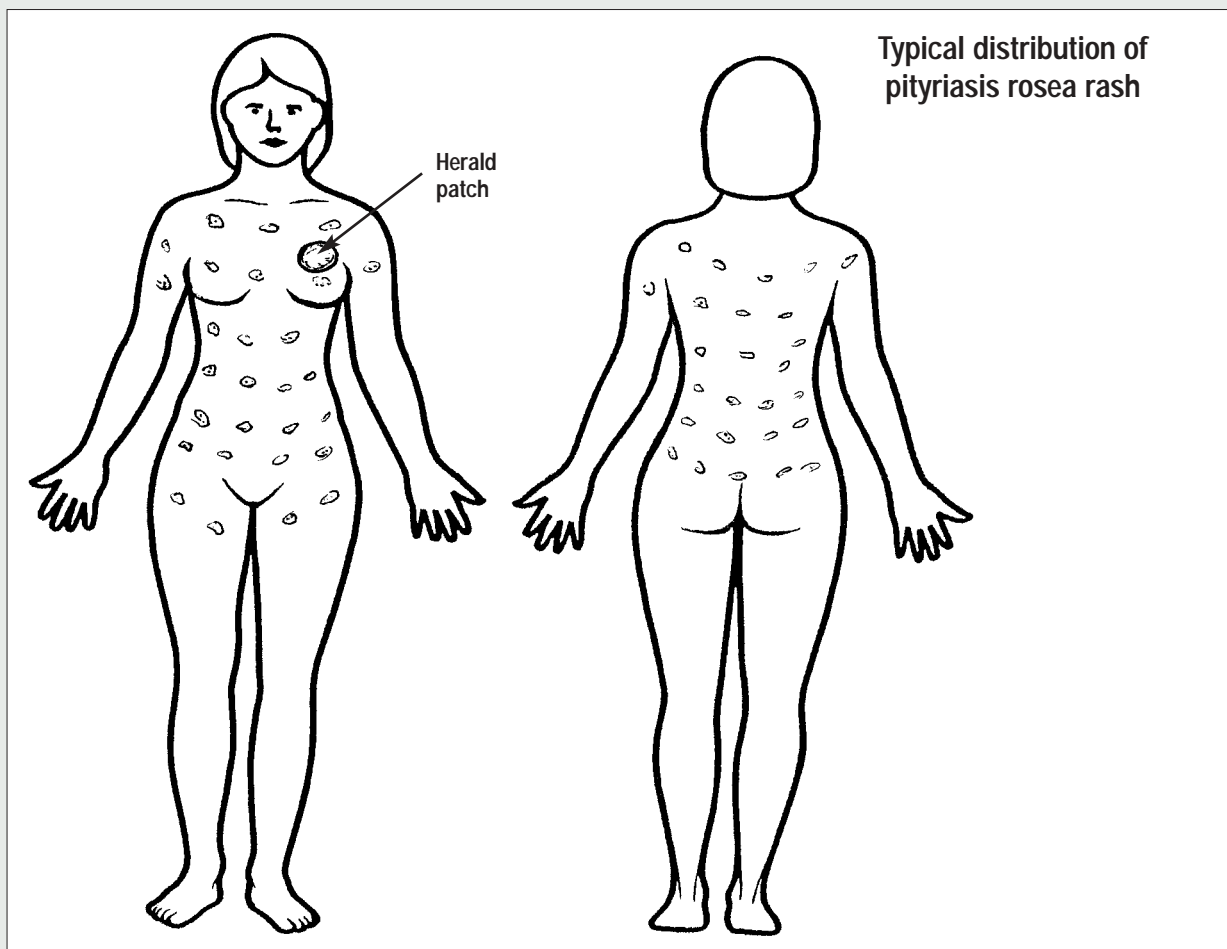


Pityriasis rosea



What is pityriasis rosea?

It is a characteristic skin rash thought to be caused by a virus. It commonly occurs in young adults (especially aged 15-30), but might occur at any age. It is not considered to be contagious.

What are the symptoms?

The herald patch

The rash usually starts with a large spot on the trunk, called a herald patch because it heralds the onset of a widespread rash 1-2 weeks later. This herald patch is often mistaken for ringworm. About one in five people with pityriasis rosea will not have a herald patch.

The rash

In a few days the spots break out over the body, covering the trunk and upper arm (in a T-shirt distribution), and the upper legs. Rarely, the rash can cover the neck and face. The

spots become oval patches (about 1-2cm) of salmon-red or copper-coloured skin with scaly margins.

The rash is arranged along the skin creases (called cleavage lines) to give the appearance of a Christmas tree, especially on the back of the body.

Other symptoms

Patients are not ill, although there may be some minor discomfort from itching. Some patients have no itching at all, while others can have considerable itching.

What are the risks?

There are no risks attached to pityriasis rosea, but you should visit your doctor to make sure you do not have another similar skin disorder, such as ringworm.

No scarring will result from the skin rash unless there is a

complicating infection. Second attacks are rare.

What are the differential diagnoses?

Apart from confusing the herald patch with ringworm, two conditions can cause confusion. One is a type of psoriasis called guttate psoriasis, which is an acute rash of sudden onset. The other is a drug eruption, which may follow the intake of drugs used to treat rheumatoid arthritis or hypertension.

How long does the rash last?

Pityriasis rosea usually runs a natural course of 4-10 weeks. It disappears of its own accord. There are no medicines or treatments available to shorten this course.

What is the treatment?

There is no special treatment for pityriasis rosea. You should lead

your normal, active life. If possible, expose the skin to moderate amounts of sunlight because this tends to lessen the rash, but you must avoid sunburn. Otherwise, ultraviolet light therapy three times a week is helpful.

Bathe and shower as usual, but use a mild soap such as Dove or Neutrogena.

If itching is a bother, use a soothing lotion or cream. Soothing lotions include:

- Calamine lotion;
- Calamine lotion with 1% phenol;
- Menthol 1% in aqueous cream;
- Urea cream.

A soothing bath oil, such as QV Bath Oil, can give relief and is particularly useful for children. If itching is severe, your doctor will probably prescribe medication, which may include a topical corticosteroid (cortisone) cream.

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