



Dermatology Patient Education

Perioral Dermatitis

Perioral dermatitis is a rash that usually forms around the mouth. Perioral means “around the mouth.” Dermatitis is the medical term for “inflamed skin.”

People of all skin colors get perioral dermatitis. This rash is most common in young and middle-aged women. Children and adolescents can also get this rash, which occurs in both girls and boys. Few men, however, get perioral dermatitis.

WHAT DOES PERIORAL DERMATITIS LOOK LIKE?

Redness, swelling, and acne-like bumps are common in people with perioral dermatitis. The rash itself usually circles the mouth, but leaves a thin band of skin around the lips that looks normal. Many people have a burning sensation around the mouth. Sometimes the rash itches. The skin can peel and look scaly.

This rash is sometimes called “periorificial dermatitis,” because this rash can form elsewhere on the face. It can circle the eyes and nose, and even appear on the cheeks. Sometimes the rash appears on the forehead.

WHAT CAUSES PERIORAL DERMATITIS?

It is not understood why some people get this rash and what causes it.

Some people who develop perioral dermatitis have exposure to a medicine to their face that contains a corticosteroid, either by applying it directly to the skin or through an oral inhaler used for asthma. A dermatologist can help treat this rash with medications other than topical steroids.

A corticosteroid is not always the cause. You can get this rash after using toothpaste that contains fluoride or cinnamon. Tartar-control and whitening toothpastes also can cause perioral dermatitis. Even moisturizers, makeup, and sunscreen can cause this rash. Dermatologists recommend that even after the rash clears, you find alternative products to prevent the rash from returning.



Perioral dermatitis

HOW IS IT DIAGNOSED?

A dermatologist can often make the diagnosis by asking you questions about the rash and examining your skin.

HOW IS IT TREATED?

Dermatologists recommend treating perioral dermatitis. Without treatment, the rash can last for months or even years. An antibiotic often provides effective treatment. For a mild case or a woman who is pregnant, your dermatologist may recommend a topical antibiotic that you apply to your face along with a gentle moisturizer. Some patients need an oral antibiotic.

Most patients improve after taking the oral antibiotic for several weeks or months. If you stop taking the antibiotic too early, the rash can return. It is important to follow your dermatologist's instructions.

To clear the rash, you also may need to stop using certain skin care products, cosmetics, and toothpastes. If you use a product that contains a corticosteroid, your dermatologist can help you develop a plan to stop using it and prevent a recurrence of perioral dermatitis.

PREVENTING FLARE-UPS

If you have had perioral dermatitis, following these recommendations from dermatologists to help prevent a flare-up:

- Do not use topical corticosteroid creams on your face for more than a couple days without a dermatologist recommendation
- Ask your dermatologist to recommend moisturizers, cosmetics, toothpastes, and sunscreens.
- If your skin does flare-up, do not try to treat a flare-up yourself. Some of the products that you can buy without a prescription contain a corticosteroid.

WHY SEE A DERMATOLOGIST

If you have signs and symptoms of perioral dermatitis, you should see a dermatologist. Many skin conditions cause redness and acne-like breakouts. Without an accurate diagnosis, treatment can worsen the condition. A dermatologist can accurately diagnose the condition and provide effective treatment.

A board-certified dermatologist is a medical doctor who specializes in diagnosing and treating the medical, surgical, and cosmetic conditions of the skin, hair and nails. To learn more or to find a board-certified dermatologist in your area, visit aad.org or call toll free (888) 462-DERM (3376).

All content solely developed by the American Academy of Dermatology.

© 2016 American Academy of Dermatology

Images used with permission of the American Academy of Dermatology National Library of Dermatologic Teaching Slides

American Academy of Dermatology

P.O. Box 4014, Schaumburg, Illinois 60168-4014

AAD Public Information Center: 888.462.DERM (3376)

AAD Member Resource Center: 866.503.SKIN (7546)

Outside the United States: 847.240.1280

Web: aad.org

Email: mrc@aad.org