

Prickly Heat

Prickly heat, heat rash or summer rash is caused by sweat becoming blocked in the epidermis and causes an itching or burning sensation with little blisters on the surface of the skin or deeper red lumps. It is not contagious, and it has no connection to skin cancer or malignant melanoma.

It can affect anyone at any age, but is most common in **women between the ages of 20-40** with lighter skin tones. It is thought that 10% of the population experience heat rash or photosensitivity, and that well over half the population experience some level of itching, skin prickling or discomfort when they are exposed to sunlight.

Prickly heat usually affects parts of the body covered by clothes, such as the **back, abdomen, neck, upper chest, groin or armpits**. Predominantly caused by exposure to sun, heat and humidity, Prickly heat can also be triggered by any number of reasons including:

- An increase in strenuous activity which leads to perspiration which can irritate the skin.
- Clothing that traps sweat next to your body, such as synthetic fabrics and tight clothing.
- Your diet – things like red wine, coffee and spicy foods.
- An over production of anti-histamines in your body due to exposure to allergens, like dust mites, pollen and perfumes.
- Stress and anxiety
- New brands of toiletries or the use of sunscreens.
- Pregnancy can make your skin super-sensitive.
- Certain medications may increase your risk of heat rash
- You may also experience a rash if you regularly apply perfumes to the same spot on your skin, such as your décolleté, as skin can become hyper-sensitive under the sun's rays.
- Photosensitivity or Polymorphic Light Eruption (PMLE)

Types of Prickly Heat

Miliaria Crystalline

A mild form of prickly heat causing small bubbles on the skin about 1-2mm in size, usually without skin redness or pain and itching. Forming when sweat ducts get clogged in the upper most layer of the skin, this type of heat rash is common in new babies, but can occur in adults where it usually appears on the forehead, neck, back and chest.

Miliaria Rubra

Characterised by an itchy and prickly sensation and red bumps on the skin, this heat rash affects the middle layers of the skin. It can occur in adults exposed to heat and humidity and also in babies up to three or four weeks of age.

Miliaria Profunda

An uncommon form of heat rash that usually occurs in adults who have recurring Miliaria Rubra. It affects the deeper layers of the skin and can cause flesh coloured skin lesions around 1-3mm in size on the body, arms and legs. Sufferers may also experience nausea, increased pulse rate and dizziness.

Polymorphic Light Eruption (PMLE)

Often occurring at the first signs of sun in the spring, or in the first couple of days on a holiday in a new climate, Polymorphic light eruption (PMLE) is a skin rash that occurs as a result of exposure to the sun. It is not harmful or contagious, but it can be uncomfortable and embarrassing.

Tips For Preventing

Tips for preventing Prickly Heat, Heat Rash and Polymorphic Light Eruption:

- Avoid tight clothing that can irritate the skin. Ideally wear light, loose-fitting cotton clothing.
- In hot temperatures, stay in the shade or air-conditioned areas, or use a fan to circulate the air.
- Keep your sleeping area cool and well ventilated.
- Bathe with cold water using products that do not contain soap, fragrances or dyes which can all dry your skin.
- Avoid using heavy creams or oils as they can block pores and exacerbate symptoms.
- Avoid situations that can lead to excessive sweating, such as hot, humid environments and strenuous physical activity.