

Papular urticaria, usually called hives, is characterized by large numbers of very itchy red bumps (papules) that come and go every few days over a period of a month or so. The bumps are usually between 0.2 and 2 cm. in size and some may develop into fluid-filled blisters (bullae). This condition is usually triggered by allergic reactions to insect bites, sensitivity to drugs, or other environmental causes. In some cases, swelling of the soft tissues of the face, neck, and hands (angioedema) may also occur. Acute papular urticaria and angioedema are essentially exaggerated allergic reactions limited to the skin and tissues just under the skin (subcutaneous tissues). The reaction may be caused by a drug allergy, by insect stings or bites, by desensitization injections (allergy shots) or ingestion of certain foods (particularly eggs, shellfish, nuts or fruits) by people who are allergic to these substances. In some cases (such as reactions to strawberries), the reaction may occur only after overindulgence, and possibly result from direct toxic histamine release into the blood. If acute angioedema is recurrent, progressive, and never associated with urticaria, a hereditary enzyme deficiency should be suspected. Children from 2 to 7 years are most commonly, but not exclusively, affected by papular urticaria. Children are especially susceptible in the summertime when the insect population increases. It is more rare in adults, perhaps in part because adults build up a tolerance.