

Physical urticaria is a condition in which red (erythematous) allergic skin lesions and itching (pruritus) are produced by exposure to heat, cold, or contact with chemicals or plants. These are called wheals by the medical community and may range in size from a couple of millimeters to a couple of centimeters. The center of the lesion may range in color from white to red, and it is usually surrounded by a flare of red skin. The disorder occurs most commonly in children. The underlying cause of physical urticaria is unknown in most cases. Some clinicians believe that an auto-immunological process is responsible. Cold urticaria occurs most often in infants, although it sometimes occurs in adults. The patient history and physical examination are the tools most often used to diagnose physical urticaria. If there is a history of reactions to physical triggers, the diagnosis may be confirmed with a challenge. The challenge is the application of the suspected agent, for example ice or light, to the skin, in hope of getting a response.