



[Home](#) → [Medical Encyclopedia](#) → Erythroderma

URL of this page: //medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001610.htm

## Erythroderma

Erythroderma is widespread redness of the skin. It is accompanied by scaling, peeling, and flaking of the skin, and may include itching and hair loss.

### Causes

Erythroderma may occur due to:

- Complication of other skin conditions, such as eczema and psoriasis
- Reaction to medicines or some chemicals, such as phenytoin and allopurinol
- Some types of cancer, such as lymphoma

Sometimes the cause is unknown. It is more common in males.

### Symptoms

Symptoms may include any of the following:

- Redness over 80% to 90% of the body
- Scaly skin patches
- Thickened skin
- Skin is itchy or painful with an odor
- Swelling of the arms or legs
- Fast heart beat
- Loss of fluids, leading to dehydration
- Loss of temperature regulation by the body

There may be secondary infections of the skin.

### Exams and Tests

Your health care provider will ask about your symptoms and take your medical history. The provider will do a skin examination with a dermatoscope. Most of the time, the cause can be identified after the exam.

If needed, the following tests may be ordered:

- Biopsy of the skin
- Allergy testing
- Other tests to find the cause of erythroderma

## Treatment

Since erythroderma can quickly lead to serious complications, the provider will start treatment right away. This usually involves strong doses of cortisone medicines to reduce inflammation.

Other treatments may include:

- Medicines to treat the underlying cause of erythroderma
- Antibiotics for any infection
- Dressings applied to the skin
- Ultraviolet light
- Correction of fluid and electrolyte balance

## Outlook (Prognosis)

In serious cases, the person needs to be treated in the hospital.

## Possible Complications

Complications may include:

- Secondary infections that can lead to sepsis (bodywide inflammatory response)
- Fluid loss that can result in dehydration and an imbalance of minerals (electrolytes) in the body
- Heart failure

## When to Contact a Medical Professional

Contact your provider right away if:

- Symptoms get worse or do not get better, even with treatment.
- You develop new lesions.

## Prevention

Risk for erythroderma may be reduced by following the provider's instructions on skin care.

## Alternative Names

Exfoliative dermatitis; Dermatitis exfoliativa; Pruritus - exfoliative dermatitis; Pityriasis rubra; Red man syndrome; Exfoliative erythroderma

# References

Calonje E, Brenn T, Lazar AJ, Billings SD. Spongiotic, psoriasiform and pustular dermatoses. In: Calonje E, Brenn T, Lazar AJ, Billings SD, eds. *McKee's Pathology of the Skin*. 5th ed. Philadelphia, PA: Elsevier; 2020:chap 6.

James WD, Elston DM, Treat JR, Rosenbach MA, Neuhaus IM. Pityriasis rosea, pityriasis rubra pilaris, and other papulosquamous and hyperkeratotic diseases. In: James WD, Elston DM, Treat JR, Rosenbach MA, Neuhaus IM, eds. *Andrews' Diseases of the Skin*. 13th ed. Philadelphia, PA: Elsevier; 2020:chap 11.

Whittaker S. Erythroderma. In: Bolognia JL, Schaffer JV, Cerroni L, eds. *Dermatology*. 5th ed. Philadelphia, PA: Elsevier; 2024:chap 10.

## Review Date 2/15/2024

Updated by: Elika Hoss, MD, Assistant Professor of Dermatology, Mayo Clinic, Scottsdale, AZ. Also reviewed by David C. Dugdale, MD, Medical Director, Brenda Conaway, Editorial Director, and the A.D.A.M. Editorial team.

### Learn how to cite this page



Health Content  
Provider  
06/01/2028

A.D.A.M., Inc. is accredited by URAC, for Health Content Provider ([www.urac.org](http://www.urac.org)). URAC's [accreditation program](#) is an independent audit to verify that A.D.A.M. follows rigorous standards of quality and accountability. A.D.A.M. is among the first to achieve this important distinction for online health information and services. Learn more about A.D.A.M.'s [editorial policy](#), [editorial process](#), and [privacy policy](#).

The information provided herein should not be used during any medical emergency or for the diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. A licensed medical professional should be consulted for diagnosis and treatment of any and all medical conditions. Links to other sites are provided for information only – they do not constitute endorsements of those other sites. No warranty of any kind, either expressed or implied, is made as to the accuracy, reliability, timeliness, or correctness of any translations made by a third-party service of the information provided herein into any other language. © 1997-2025 A.D.A.M., a business unit of Ebix, Inc. Any duplication or distribution of the information contained herein is strictly prohibited.



National Library of Medicine 8600 Rockville Pike, Bethesda, MD 20894 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

National Institutes of Health