

Vaginitis or Vulvitis in the Pre-pubertal Girl

Vulvitis is an irritation of the vulva or lips of the vagina. It is extremely common in pre-adolescent girls. Before puberty, girls make very little estrogen, a hormone responsible for thickening and lubricating the vulva, so irritations occur easily.

Symptoms

- Burning, itching, scratching of genital area
- Painful urination

Triggers or Causes

- Hygiene
 - Overly-aggressive wiping
 - Incomplete wiping
 - Residual urine
 - Residual stool
- Best to wipe from front to back to avoid dragging stool across the vulva
- Incompletely rinsed soap, especially in the shower
- Bubble bath, soapy bath water, or shampoo rinsed into the bathwater
- Allergic reaction to perfumes or dyes – use unscented toilet paper, avoid powders or sprays to the genital area. Do not use fabric softener, including dryer sheets.
- Self-stimulation or rubbing
- Tight-fitting garments that do not allow moisture to escape
- Occasionally, an infection with bacteria will occur in the vagina or vulva
 - Strep infections – cause intense redness, often involving the anus as well
 - Other bacterial infections – cause a yellow-green discharge with staining on the underwear
- Pinworms are a rare cause of vulvitis
 - Intestinal parasite infection
 - Usually cause anal itching
 - Treated with prescription medication to kill the pinworms
- Yeast infections are rare in pre-pubertal girls who do not wear diapers.
 - Intense redness is seen on the skin surrounding the genitals
 - Yeast does not grow well inside the vagina before puberty, so internal infection is rare
- Foreign bodies such as a piece of toilet paper trapped in the vagina can cause irritation with discharge and often with a foul odor
- The possibility of inappropriate touching or abuse is a consideration when any child experiences genital irritation, although this is a less common cause.
- Certain skin disorders such as eczema, psoriasis or lichen sclerosis may occur on the genital skin

Treatment

- Soak for 10-15 minutes in a tub of plain warm water, once or twice a day
 - May add ¼ cup baking soda or a packet of Aveeno oatmeal bath for additional soothing
 - Do not use soap on the genital area; if soap cleansing is necessary, use mild soap such as unscented Dove or Cetaphil soap-free cleanser
- Gently pat dry with a towel or air-dry the area; do not rub
- Apply a thick coating of a petroleum product such as A&D ointment, Aquaphor, or Vaseline. Reapply several times a day
- If itch or irritation is severe, a 1% hydrocortisone cream (over-the-counter) may be used twice a day for 3 days.
- Use benadryl at bedtime for itch control
- Consider sleeping without underwear / pajamas for a few days
- Wear white cotton underwear; change underwear frequently
- Urinate with legs spread widely apart; straddle the toilet
- Irritation will usually resolve in 3-5 days with this program
- Relapses are common and are treated in the same way