

Tinea Versicolor

Tinea versicolor is a common, harmless fungal infection of the skin. It produces reddish-brown or light-colored oval spots, covered with a very fine scale. The spots may join together to cover a larger area of the skin. The rash is most often found on the chest, back, and upper arms. Effective medications are available, but tinea versicolor may return after treatment.

What is tinea versicolor?

Tinea versicolor is a fungal infection of the very top layer of skin cells. The yeast form of the fungus that causes tinea versicolor is normally found on the skin. The rash occurs when there is increased growth of the fungus—this most commonly occurs in hot, humid conditions or on areas of the body where there is excessive sweating. The infection is harmless. It usually improves with treatment, but the problem may return.

What does it look like?

The rash of tinea versicolor can look several different ways.

- There may be flat, oval spots covered with a very fine scale. The spots vary in color. In light-skinned people, they are usually reddish-brown. In dark-skinned people, the spots may be either light or dark.
- The rash occurs most commonly on the upper arms, chest, and back. It may also appear on the face, arms and hands, and groin.
- Over time, the spots may grow and join together into large patches of rash. The area under the rash does not tan.
- There is usually little to no itching.

What increases your child's risk of tinea versicolor?

- Most often, it occurs in hot, humid weather. The rash may go away if the weather gets cool.
- It is most common in teens and young adults and usually doesn't occur in younger children (but can occur at any age, especially in warm climates).

How is tinea versicolor diagnosed?

- The doctor often recognizes tinea versicolor from the appearance of the rash. If unsure, the doctor may collect a sample of scale by scraping the rash. He or she can look at the sample under the microscope to see if fungus is present.
- The doctor may shine a special light, called a Wood's lamp, on the rash. This produces a certain color (fluorescence) if fungus is present.

How is tinea versicolor treated?

- Tinea versicolor can be treated with a topical (placed on the skin) lotion, cream, or ointment. These may include selenium sulfide (Selsun) or antifungal creams like clotrimazole (Lotrimin). When using antifungal creams, they should be placed on the rash twice a day for 2 to 4 weeks.
- The doctor may recommend an oral antifungal drug, such as fluconazole (Diflucan) or ketoconazole (Nizoral). These drugs are given in a single dose, and the dose may be repeated in a week.

There is a risk the rash may return after treatment. If this happens, call our office because repeat treatment is usually effective.

When should I call your office?

Call our office if the rash isn't eliminated after treatment or if it returns.