

Let's Talk About...

Genital redness, irritation, and vaginal discharge

There are two types of conditions that can affect a girl's genitals: genital redness and irritation, and vaginitis also known as vaginal discharge. Parents often confuse genital redness and irritation with vaginal discharge and vaginitis, but they are not the same.

What is genital redness and irritation?

Genital redness and irritation occur on the visible, outside parts of the genitals. The labia and surrounding area can become sore and itchy.

What causes genital redness and irritation?

Genital irritation can be caused by:

- Poor hygiene
- Not wiping well after using the toilet
- Not changing dirty underwear
- Leaking urine frequently in underwear
- Using bubble bath or perfumed soaps

How is genital redness and irritation diagnosed?

Your child's healthcare provider may ask about products your child uses or their hygiene habits. Then they will look at your child to see if they have genital redness or irritation. The provider may ask your child to wash and wipe well for a week or two. Your child should also avoid products that irritate the genitals.

If the problem does not go away, the healthcare provider may do more tests. They may swab your child's vagina to see what is causing the problem.

How is genital redness and irritation treated?

To treat genital redness and irritation, your child's healthcare provider may suggest:

- Anti-yeast medicine
(if your child is taking antibiotics or is diabetic)
- Petroleum jelly or gentle diaper rash ointments
- Avoiding antibiotics and steroid creams on the genital area
- Bathing without fragranced soap
(read the section about treating irritation at home)



If the healthcare provider takes a culture of the genital area and finds your child has vaginal discharge or vaginitis, they can prescribe the right antibiotic.

