



# PUBLIC FACT SHEET

## HIVES

### What are hives?

Hives are itchy, red welts on the skin. They are usually a sign of an allergic reaction to a food or medication.

### What are possible symptoms?

Symptoms may include:

- Raised welts of various sizes, surrounded by a red rash.
- Burning below the skin.
- Itching.
- The welts may change shape.
- The welts may disappear and reappear within minutes or hours.

### What causes hives?

When you have an allergic reaction your body releases histamine and other chemicals. These chemicals can cause you to have hives. Many substances can trigger hives including:

- Medications
- Shellfish, nuts, eggs and other foods
- Pollen
- Animal dander
- Insect bites
- Emotional stress
- Extreme cold or sun exposure
- Excessive perspiration
- Some illnesses may trigger hives

### How are hives diagnosed?

Your doctor can tell if you have hives by looking at your skin. Sometimes a doctor may do skin or blood tests to confirm an allergic reaction or to test for what may have caused the reaction.

### What is the treatment for hives?

- Treatment may not be needed if the symptoms are mild.
- To reduce the swelling and itching try the following:
  - Apply cool compresses to the welts.
  - Avoid tight-fitting clothing.
  - Apply calamine lotion.
  - Take antihistamines.

### IF YOU HAVE DIFFICULTY BREATHING, CALL 911 IMMEDIATELY!

### Call your healthcare provider for more advice if:

- You have recurring bouts of hives lasting a month or more
- You develop hives after a blood transfusion
- Your hives appear under the skin

### For more information on hives:

Ottawa County Health Department

[www.miOttawa.org](http://www.miOttawa.org)

Medline Plus/National Institutes of Health

[www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/000845.htm](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/000845.htm)