

## DEFINITION

1. **Urticaria** (nettle-rash or hives) is an eruption of transient erythematous or oedematous swellings of the skin. **Angioneurotic oedema** (angio-oedema) and **giant urticaria** are terms used to describe larger manifestations.

## CLINICAL MANIFESTATIONS

2. The lesions of urticaria are very variable in severity, extent and timing. The typical lesion has a white oedematous centre with a variable halo of erythema. It may consist only of erythema. Bullae may occasionally form. The size varies from that of a pin-head to many inches across and the shape may be very irregular. The lesions may occur at any site and may be few or numerous. Characteristically they are intensely itchy. Individual lesions last for between a few minutes and several days.
3. Angioneurotic oedema also varies considerably in severity. Almost any area of the body may be involved, most commonly the lips, eyelids and genitalia. It may be associated with other signs of anaphylactic shock.

## AETIOLOGY

4. The causes are numerous and varied and include the following:
  - 4.1 **Physical** - including pressure, heat, light, cold, water and vibration.
  - 4.2 **Hereditary (familial).**
  - 4.3 **Contact** with various chemical substances, including stinging nettles, arthropod hairs, snake venom and insect bites and stings. When it is due to insect bites it is sometimes referred to as papular urticaria.
  - 4.4 **Hypersensitivity** to many ingested substances including drugs, vaccines, food and dyes.
  - 4.5 **Infestation** with various organisms, in particular filariasis and strongyloidiasis.
  - 4.6 **Unknown** - in many cases it is impossible to determine a cause.

## CONCLUSION

5. Urticaria is a skin condition, usually itchy, which has a variety of causes. Angioneurotic oedema and giant urticaria are more widespread manifestations of the same basic pathological process.

## REFERENCES

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