Erysipelas

Erysipelas is an infection of the skin around the nose, cheeks, ears, legs or on the buttocks. Erysipelas usually occurs in young children and the elderly. It is caused by entry of bacteria (strep or streptococcus) through breaks in the skin. The breaks in the skin may be caused by:

- A recent injury to the skin through trauma.
- Swelling of the skin due to radiation therapy.
- Current skin infection (such as athelete's foot or impetigo).
- Accumulation of fluid through:
  - Poor circulation.
  - Heart failure.
  - Liver disease.
  - Past surgery to remove lymph nodes.
- Being overweight.

This condition may start suddenly with:

- A red rash raised above the level of surrounding skin.
- Local heat.
- Swelling.

The rash may be preceded by:

- Chills.
- High fever.
- Headache.
- Vomiting.
- Joint pains.

It usually requires 10 days of antibiotic treatment to make sure the infection is gone. Sometimes the first doses are given by injection. If your leg is infected, especially when blisters are present, you may require hospitalization and intravenous (IV) antibiotics.

Get plenty of rest and drink extra fluids for the next few days. If erysipelas involves a limb, keep the affected limb elevated. Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort, or fever as directed by your caregiver. Call your caregiver if your rash and other symptoms worsen or do not improve over the next 1-2 days.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF YOU DEVELOP:

- Severe headache, weakness, dehydration, or a high fever.
- Repeated vomiting, chest or abdominal pain.
- Allergic reaction to your medicine such as hives, itching, swelling, breathing problems, or fainting.

Document Released: 01/25/2006 Document Re-Released: 03/16/2010
ExitCare® Patient Information ©2011 ExitCare, LLC.