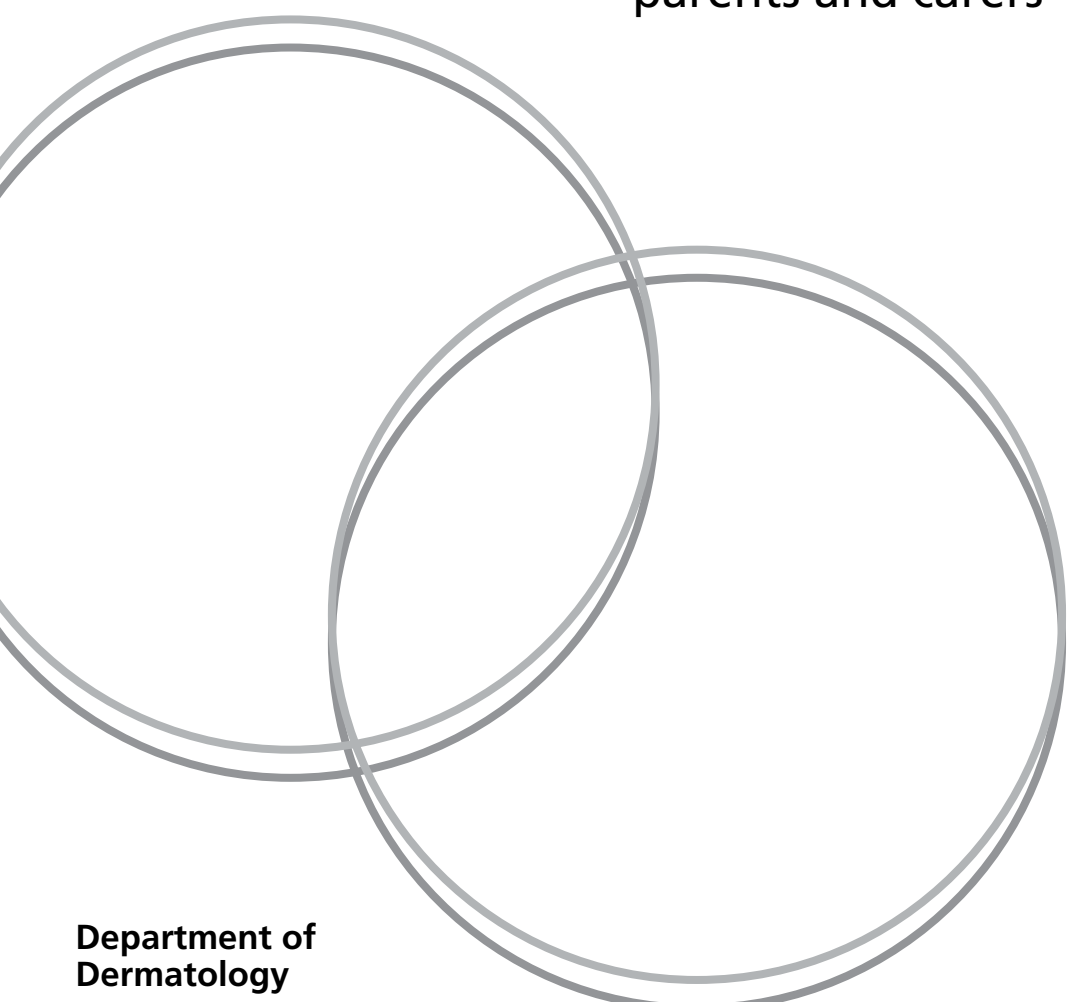




Oxford University Hospitals  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Vulvitis in childhood

Information for  
parents and carers



Department of  
Dermatology



## What is vulvitis?

Vulvitis is when the outer part of the vagina (the vulva) becomes irritated and inflamed. The main symptom your child may experience is itching, but the vulva may also become painful and passing urine can be uncomfortable.

This problem is more likely to affect young girls before puberty and the symptoms are often worse at night.

## What causes vulvitis?

Before puberty, the lining of the vulva is very thin and sensitive to any product containing soap. Most vaginal itching or discomfort is due to soaps irritating the vulval skin. This could be from bubble bath, shampoo, shower gel or soap that is left on the genital area. Occasionally it is due to poor hygiene (such as wiping from back to front instead of front to back).

## How long does it last?

The discomfort should go away after 1 to 2 days of treatment.

## Treating vulvitis

There are two ways in which you can help relieve the symptoms of vulvitis:

### **Treatment to reduce irritation: Baking soda and warm water soaks**

Add 4 tablespoons of baking soda to a bathtub of warm water (reduce the quantity if using a basin rather than a bath). (Note: Baking soda is better than vinegar soaks when treating children). Encourage your child to sit in the water for 10 minutes. Make sure she opens her legs and allows the water to cleanse her genital area. Soap/shampoo should not be used at the same time.

Repeat this twice a day for the next two days. The baking soda soaks will help to remove any soap, concentrated urine or other irritants from her genital area and will also help the area to heal. After the symptoms go away, continue to cleanse her genital area once a day with warm water and an emollient (such as Cetaben) and continue to avoid using soaps and shampoos.

### **Treatment for itching: Hydrocortisone ointment (1%), Daktacort ointment or Trimovate cream**

Apply a small amount of 1% hydrocortisone ointment, Daktacort ointment or Trimovate cream to the genital area after the baking soda soaks, especially if itching is a major symptom. You can do this for up to 7 days, then stop using the cream or ointment. You can use these treatments again if necessary for any itching (see the end of the following section for guidance).

It is very unusual to get any problems from using these treatments on this area and they are an important part of treating and managing this condition. If your child still has itching, despite using the ointments or cream, she may need a stronger topical steroid. Your GP will be able to prescribe this.

## Preventing the vulvitis from returning

- Only cleanse your child's genital area with warm water. You can use an emollient (an emulsifying ointment or cream) such as Cetraben as a soap substitute, if required. Do not use soap or products containing soap.
- If necessary, use the emollient on a tissue to remove any dried secretions from between the labia that don't come off with water.
- Don't use bubble bath before puberty. It is very irritating to vulval skin.
- Don't put any other soaps or shampoo into the bath water. If you need to shampoo your child's hair, do this at the end of the bath or only during showers. Alternatively, try to do it over the side of the bath or in the wash basin, without your child's body being in the water.
- Don't let a bar of soap float around in the bathtub.
- Keep normal bath time to less than 10 minutes, as water itself can be irritating after a while.
- Try to get your child to urinate immediately after having a bath, so that they flush any water or urine out.
- If your child is still in nappies, this can make symptoms worse (even if they're just being used at night). Their vulval symptoms may not fully improve until they are completely potty trained. Wet wipes should be avoided, as they can contain irritants; try to just use warm water and cotton wool.
- Make sure your child only wears cotton underpants. Avoid underpants made of synthetic fibres (polyester or nylon), as these can cause skin irritation. Discourage her from wearing underpants during the night, so her genital area has a chance to 'air out'.
- Teach your child to wipe herself correctly, from front to back, especially after a poo.

- Use emollients on toilet paper to wipe after peeing and pooing, to help avoid irritation.
- Encourage your child to drink enough fluids each day to keep her urine dilute (light coloured). Concentrated urine can also irritate the vulval skin.
- It is absolutely fine for your child to continue swimming, but apply an emollient to her vulval skin before and after swimming.
- Weekend treatments of the ointments/creams may be recommended, to control ongoing symptoms.

## Signs to look out for

### **Contact your GP if:**

- the itching has not settled after 48 hours of the recommended treatments
- there is any vaginal discharge or bleeding
- there is pain when passing urine
- you have other concerns or questions.

## How to contact us

If you have any further questions, please contact your child's dermatology consultant's secretary.

Tel: **01865 228 224**

(9.00am to 5.00pm, Monday to Friday)

If you need an interpreter or would like this information leaflet in another format, such as Easy Read, large print, Braille, audio, electronically or another language, please speak to the department where you are being seen. You will find their contact details on your appointment letter.

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