Lichen Planus

Lichen planus (LIE kun PLAY nuss) is a rash that appears on the skin as shiny, flat bumps. The bumps may be clustered together in patches or dispersed (scattered far apart). They can be red or purple in color. The rash may be itchy. These bumps (also called lesions) can occur anywhere on the body but are most often found on the legs and wrists. Sometimes they can also appear in the mouth as white lines or bumps. The cause of the rash is not known but lichen planus is common. It is not contagious (your child did not get the rash from someone else and cannot give it to anyone). Current evidence suggests lichen planus is an autoimmune process – when the body attacks its own cells.

Diagnosis and Treatment

Lichen planus is diagnosed by a physical examination by a doctor. Sometimes, a biopsy (small sample of skin) may be taken to confirm that the rash is lichen planus. The rash or bumpy areas usually go away on their own within a couple of years. Sometimes lichen planus can appear in the mouth. This can cause burning or pain and may last even longer than lichen planus on the skin.

Usually lichen planus does not cause other problems and may not need treatment. If needed, medicines can be given to treat both the skin and the mouth. Steroid cream or some medicines (called antihistamines) can be used to treat itchiness and redness (inflammation). Sometimes there will be dark spots on the skin after the bumps have gone away that may take extra time to fade.

What to Watch for at Home

The rash may take several weeks to months to appear completely. However, once it has all appeared, it should not change. If it continues to spread or becomes very bothersome, you may call your child’s doctor for further examination and treatment.

- If your child has lichen planus in the mouth, make sure he or she stays away from drinks with caffeine and spicy or citrusy foods.
- Make sure your child continues to brush his or her teeth and go to the dentist regularly.
- Sometimes nail changes can occur with this rash.
- It is not common but lichen planus can recur (come back) after it has healed.