

Monilia (Candida) or Yeast Infections (Thrush)



What Is It?

Monilia, candida or yeast infections are caused by various species of candida, especially *Candida albicans*, and are very common in babies and young children in diapers.

What Are the Symptoms?

Thrush is seen in the mouths of infected children as white patches which look like milk curds but cannot be wiped off.

Diaper rash caused by monilia looks different and starts as very red, raised, round spots. Often there will be a larger spot with surrounding smaller ones. Sometimes the spots all run together, and what you see are large areas of beefy red, raised skin which are very sore and may even bleed. Occasionally a bacteria will invade this raw skin and create a secondary infection with ooze.

Who Gets It and How?

These infections are particularly common in diapered children, but adults can get thrush in their mouths or a monilial rash in their groin or other moist areas. They are very mild infections in healthy people and almost everyone gets exposed. Yeast organisms which cause monilial infections are everywhere. Although they can be spread from one person to another, people usually catch it from themselves. Usually the organisms are already on the body waiting for the right conditions. When skin is wet and a little raw (such as in diaper and groin areas), the yeast can invade the skin and start spreading. Yeast infections can also occur after treatment with antibiotics for other conditions.

Many infants get candida infections from their mothers during birth. Many of those who escape this infection soon acquire candida from close contacts with other family members, relatives and friends. These early exposures may result in an oral infection (thrush).

In most persons, these infections run their course and then heal. However, in newborns or persons with weak immune systems, this yeast can cause more serious or chronic infections.

When Should People with this Illness Be Excluded?

Since most persons are already infected with candida, children with thrush and candida diaper rash need not be excluded from child care as long they are able to participate comfortably. If children have diaper rashes which last more than one to two days, ask the parents to see their health care provider for diagnosis and treatment. The child's health care provider will prescribe medication (drops for mouth, cream for the diaper area). High absorbency disposable diapers may help keep the skin dry. Plastic pants that do not allow air to circulate over the diaper area should not be used, although the diapering system should be able to hold urine or liquid feces.

How Can I Limit the Spread of these Infections?

Child care providers should follow good hygiene. This includes careful hand washing and disposal of nasal and oral discharges of children with thrush in order to avoid spread of infection to children who are not already infected.