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COLD URTICARIA

What is cold urticaria?

Cold induced urticaria, or cold induced hives, is a condition with quick onset of itching, swelling and redness after being exposed to the cold. The hives (urticaria) and swelling typically develop on the areas exposed to the cold, and usually develops as the area warms after the exposure.

Can cold urticaria be serious?

Yes. If the large areas of the skin are exposed to the cold (like swimming or unprotected skin in the winter) there can be a more systemic severe reaction like anaphylaxis. There can also be swelling of the tongue and throat. The worst reactions tend to occur with large amounts of skin exposure, or with exposure of the mouth/throat to very cold temperatures.

What steps can be taken for prevention?

1. Keep the epinephrine autoinjector (such as EpiPen) available at all times
2. Take a non-sedating antihistamine before cold exposure; consider regular antihistamines in the winter or if hives are otherwise regular
3. Avoid cold showers and cold drinks/food
4. Be very careful with swimming. Don't swim in cold water. Always dip the foot into the water first (never dive or jump into water). Cover as much of the skin as possible if swimming. Always avoid quick changes in temperature (ie don't go from warm to cool water quickly). Never swim alone.
5. Cover exposed parts when out in the cold weather such as warm mitts and boots
6. If there's a surgery scheduled make sure the surgical team knows about the cold urticaria to prevent symptoms in the operating room

How should reactions be treated?

If there is any significant or severe reaction use the autoinjector immediately and seek emergency care help