

Balanitis in children

Paediatrics Emergency Department

Information for patients and carers

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Caring for you

What is balanitis?

This is when the head of the penis becomes red, sore, or swollen.

A GP can usually treat it.

What causes it?

In children, the foreskin is often still attached to the head of the penis.

As your child grows, the foreskin usually separates by itself. This may happen before high school age, but it can happen later.

Sometimes a small amount of pee collects under the foreskin. This can cause the foreskin to swell and look like a small balloon.

Signs and symptoms

Your child may have:

- redness or swelling at the end of the penis
- a thick discharge with an unpleasant smell
- pain or stinging when peeing
- bleeding around the foreskin

If it hurts when your child pees, you can:

- let your child sit in a warm bath to make peeing easier
- gently squeeze the tip of the penis, or ask your child to do it, to release any trapped pee
- give them paracetamol or ibuprofen. Always follow the instructions on the packet

The foreskin should not be forced back.

Get urgent medical help if:

- your child cannot pee after trying the advice above
- your child is in severe pain
- there is heavy bleeding
- the penis is very painful, swollen or has changed colour
- the foreskin is stuck behind the head of the penis

Other causes

Balanitis can be caused by:

- a tight foreskin that does not pull back on its own

- a skin infection
- scarring that makes it difficult to put the foreskin back.
- a urine (pee) infection (UTI)
- skin conditions such as eczema or psoriasis
- diabetes, which can make thrush more likely

Treatment

The GP may prescribe:

- a steroid cream to reduce swelling and help loosen a tight foreskin
- an antibiotic cream if there is a bacterial infection

The GP may discuss an operation if the problem does not improve or keeps coming back.

If your child needs urgent medical help

You can:

- contact your GP
- call NHS 111
- take your child to an Urgent Treatment Centre
- take your child to the nearest Emergency Department (A&E)