A hemangioma is a collection of extra blood vessels that is common in infancy.

Hemangiomas of Infancy

What is a hemangioma?
A hemangioma (hee-man-gee-o-ma) is a collection of extra blood vessels. It is one of the most common skin problems in children under age 1.

Hemangiomas may not be present at birth. They often appear a few days to 2 months after birth. When they occur at this time, they are called “hemangiomas of infancy.” A hemangioma is usually not painful unless an ulcer or a sore develops on it. We do not know what causes hemangiomas.

If it’s red (“superficial”), then it’s in the top skin layers. If it’s blue (“deep”), then it’s deeper or under the skin. Often, there’s a combination of these called “mixed.” They may be anywhere on the body.

How do hemangiomas grow?
Hemangiomas of infancy can grow for several months and rarely do they grow after a year of age. Then they usually begin a long, slow fading process known as “involution.” This process can last from 3 to 12 years. About 50 percent fade by age 5 and about 70 percent fade completely by age 7.

While most hemangiomas eventually fade, they may not go away completely. They can leave behind some redness, textural changes, a residual fatty mass or scar. Early intervention can reduce the need for corrective surgery after involution has occurred.

Are hemangiomas harmful?
While some hemangiomas require no treatment, others can cause problems with vision, breathing feeding or disfigurement. Infants who have multiple hemangiomas (hemangiomatosis) may be checked for lesions on internal organs or other medical problems (such as hypothyroidism).

Hemangiomas that grow internally may require treatment.

Bleeding
If the skin over the top of the hemangioma is accidently injured, it may bleed. If this happens, put direct pressure over the bleeding for 5 to 10 minutes and the bleeding should stop. A lot of bleeding is very rare. After the bleeding stops, apply petroleum jelly or antibiotic ointment to the area and call the clinic. If the bleeding does not stop, then call your child’s doctor as soon as possible or take your child to the emergency room.

Ulcers
If you notice brown or tan material on the hemangioma and it is painful to your child, this is probably an ulcer (ulceration) or sore. Apply petroleum jelly or antibiotic ointment to the area and call the clinic. Ulcers can be painful and cause scarring. They usually heal with medical or laser treatment. Avoid ulcers by reducing rubbing (friction) to the area. You can do this by avoiding tight fitting clothing or putting a diaper cream or petroleum jelly on hemangiomas that are in areas that get a lot of friction, like the diaper area.
How are hemangiomas diagnosed?
Hemangiomas are diagnosed by a physical exam, a medical history and sometimes an ultrasound.
If your child has multiple hemangiomas, the doctor may use imaging tests to confirm diagnosis. This includes an ultrasound, MRI or CT scan. Sometimes, the doctor will need to take a biopsy of the skin, where they cut a small piece of tissue and examine it.

How are hemangiomas treated?
At Children’s, we have a group of health care providers who treat hemangiomas as a team. These treatments are based on your child’s medical needs and your family’s decisions.

- Small hemangiomas often do not require any treatment depending on location.
- Larger hemangiomas, or ones that cause problems with breathing, feeding, vision, or are in areas that affect how your child looks (cosmetically sensitive areas) need to be treated.

What are the treatments for hemangiomas?
- Medicine used on the skin (topical treatment)
- Medicine taken by mouth (oral treatment)
- Laser treatment
- Surgery

When do I call the clinic?
- If your child’s hemangioma starts to bleed.
- If your child’s hemangioma turns into an ulcer or sore.
- If you have any questions about your child’s hemangioma or their treatment plan.

How do I call the clinic?
You may call the clinic where your child was seen at any time if you have a question about your child’s hemangioma, treatment plan or need to make an appointment. The Vascular Anomalies clinic can be reached at 206-987-4606, and the Dermatology clinic can be reached at 206-987-2158.