Port Wine Stain  
(Nevus Flammeus/Capillary Malformation)

A port wine stain is a birthmark that usually does not go away with time. It is caused by an abnormal collection of small blood vessels. Port wine stains are typically pink or red in infancy. They grow proportionally larger as the child grows. They may become darker and more raised very gradually over time. Port wine stains are not painful to your child.

Port wine stains rarely occur in association with other medical problems. Your doctor will discuss this with you as needed, depending on the location of the port wine stain.

Some children with facial port wine stains may feel self-conscious as they grow older and as other children begin to notice the birthmark. Early treatment of port wine stains may lower the chance of darkening and thickening of the birthmark. It may also improve your child’s feeling of self-esteem.

Fading of a port wine stain may be done with pulsed dye laser therapy. Laser procedures may be done in the office or in the operating room depending on the size and location of the port wine stain birthmark. A numbing cream can be applied to the port wine stain 1-1/2 hour before the laser procedure to decrease discomfort if the procedure is done in the office. (See "Topical Anesthetic Creams" CARE CARD.)

Several laser treatments may be needed for the color of the birthmark to fade significantly. Laser procedures are done 2–3 months apart to allow the skin color to lighten as much as possible before the next treatment.