

# Port wine stain

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**In news**— Russia's Mikhail Gorbachev, who died recently, had a deep red blemish(port wine stain) on his almost bald forehead.

## **What is port wine stain?**

- **A port-wine stain (*nevus flammeus*) is a discoloration of the human skin caused by a vascular anomaly** (a capillary malformation in the skin).
- They are so **named for their coloration**, which is similar in color to port wine, a fortified red wine from Portugal.
- It **occurs most often on the face** but can appear anywhere on the body, particularly on the neck, upper trunk, arms and legs.
- **What Gorbachev had was a birthmark that is called a 'port wine stain'**, a name that derives from the way it looks.
- It was easy to imagine the mark as being a bit of deep red or purple liquid spilt on the former leader's head.
- **People who have the mark are usually born with it, most often on the face or arms.** On more than six out of 10 occasions, port wine stains appear on the head or neck.
- **The stain is for life, even though it may sometimes become thicker, darken,** or develop a bumpy or ridged texture as the person grows older.
- On other occasions, the stain might fade or become lighter with age and time.
- **Port wine stains are not the same as a similar birthmark that is known as 'strawberry hemangiomas'.**
- This is a **non-cancerous tumour that is formed under the skin** due to the clumping of blood vessels, and appears as a somewhat raised, dark red patch. This birthmark usually fades away by the time the child is about 10 years old.

- **A port wine stain is caused by an abnormal development of blood vessels, sometimes called a capillary malformation**, due to a mutation early in the pregnancy when the baby is developing in the womb.
- **The reason for the mutation is not clear – it is not inherited**, nor is it the result of something that has happened during the pregnancy.
- **The condition is not very common, occurring in about 1 in every 350 children, and more in girls than in boys**, research shows.
- It is usually not an indicator of any other abnormalities, even though in rare cases port wine stains on the face have been seen to be **accompanied by a serious vascular condition known as Sturge-Weber syndrome that can cause mental retardation**, glaucoma leading to blindness, seizures, or a stroke.
- **In recent years, it has become possible to use laser techniques to address port wine stains**, even though the results are not always perfect.