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Man With Foot Pain

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Figure 1. Dorsal surface of the foot, demonstrating circumscribed, tender, erythematous, solid elevations of the skin.



Figure 2. Ventral surface of the foot, demonstrating circumscribed, tender, erythematous, solid elevations of the skin.

[Ann Emerg Med. 2020;76:594.]

A 40-year-old man with no medical history presented to the emergency department with bilateral toe pain, which developed during 2 to 3 days. He was afebrile and denied associated complaints. Physical examination was significant for erythematous, tender regions over the toes of both feet (Figures 1 and 2). The patient subsequently had a positive test result for coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

*For the diagnosis and teaching points, see page 624.
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DIAGNOSIS:

COVID toes. There has been recent discussion regarding less common clinical manifestations of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), the virus that causes COVID-19. One such possible symptom has been labeled COVID toes. Individuals report areas of red or purple discoloration on the feet or hands, sometimes accompanied by a burning sensation, pain, or tenderness. Initial lesions are papular and may evolve during 1 week to become purpuric and flattened.¹ Affected patients are often in their second or third decade of life, but symptoms have also been reported in older adults. COVID toes is unique because it tends to appear in asymptomatic or mildly affected patients. Most report spontaneous resolution within 2 weeks. The exact mechanism remains unclear. Suggested causes include local vasculitis or thrombotic events. One study found all COVID-19 patients in the ICU to have acroischemia.²

Similar manifestations have been found in other diseases. However, the incidence of COVID toes has been higher than expected since the COVID-19 pandemic onset. Furthermore, a recent report found that 20% of COVID-19 patients had skin-related symptoms.³ Although experts argue whether COVID toes is a symptom of COVID-19, all agree that the medical community should be aware of it as a possible symptom.

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