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Cutaneous and Mucous Membrane Manifestations of Systemic Infections

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A wide array of infections disseminate via the bloodstream and ultimately (although not necessarily exclusively) manifest on the skin and oral mucosa. Cutaneous and subcutaneous manifestation of deep infection, in combination with fever and other symptoms, can be the hallmarks of life-threatening disease. In fact, in many cases, appearance of skin lesions may provide an early warning to both patients and clinicians of the existence of systemic infection. In immunocompromised patients, who are at especially high risk for many of these infections, the gross morphology of cutaneous lesions is not in itself pathognomonic for a single etiologic agent or disease. However, other epidemiologic and pathologic features provide important ancillary information. By describing these blood-borne infections as a discrete group and primarily highlighting their dermatologic manifestations as well as other significant characteristics, it is my intention to delineate the constellation of features that will most likely assist the clinician in establishing a speedy diagnosis.