

# Supporting a student with eczema

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## What is eczema?

Eczema is a chronic, inflammatory skin condition beginning in early childhood as a skin barrier defect. It affects up to twenty per cent of children worldwide and is often associated with other conditions such as asthma and hay fever. Eczema is not contagious. Treatment focuses on reducing inflammation and associated skin abnormalities such as itch, dryness, heat, redness and secondary infection. Secondary infection can present as broken, bleeding or oozing skin. Itch is the main clinical feature of eczema and can cause sleep disturbance and stress for the student and their family. Although there is no cure, most students can expect to gain good control of their eczema through proper management, with support from their parent/caregiver, schools and community.

For more information see:

[www.rch.org.au/derm/eczema.cfm?doc\\_id=4596](http://www.rch.org.au/derm/eczema.cfm?doc_id=4596)

[www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/factsheets.cfm?doc\\_id=3721](http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/factsheets.cfm?doc_id=3721)

## Support mechanisms

Schools are encouraged to explore support mechanisms that are available to students with a chronic health condition, as required. There is a range of resources and community groups available to assist schools. Please contact your education department or RCH Education Institute for further information.

## Strategies for schools supporting students with eczema

Supporting students with eczema at school will assist the student in keeping their skin in the best possible condition and minimise the impact of the disease. The aim is to have students with eczema attend school, be involved in most school activities and promote an inclusive school community where the student feels safe.

The implementation of the following whole-school and classroom strategies will assist and support the student in the management of eczema. While the strategies and supports aim to build the capacity of schools in recognising the general needs of these students, we also acknowledge that individual needs may vary depending on the severity of the condition.



## Whole-school approach to eczema

- Provide education and information on eczema to staff and students in consultation with the family and student.
- The school, health professionals, family and student should work in collaboration to best support the student.
- If relevant, discuss other related health concerns such as dietary requirements, asthma and allergy.
- Initiate an ongoing Student Support Group.
- Monitor attendance. The Dermatology Department RCH recommends that students unable to attend school due to eczema should seek medical attention. Schools are encouraged to promote the benefits of school attendance to families and students.
- Adapt the school uniform to meet the needs of a student with eczema (100% cotton clothing is recommended).
- Establish a key contact person with whom the family and student can liaise with regard to eczema and school issues. The key contact can create a communication network within the school to disseminate information
- Provide a key contact person who can regularly monitor, explore and assist with stress-related issues.
- Allocate predetermined spaces for moisturising, cool-compressing and changing clothes.
- If required, send a request via the school newsletter asking parents/guardians to notify the school of measles and chickenpox. This is only relevant for students taking immuno-suppressant therapy (i.e. cyclosporine, azathioprine, methotrexate)
- As with all students, discuss any medication needs with the student/parent/guardian and use as directed. In most circumstances, The Dermatology Department RCH recommends that wet bandages are not worn to school and are applied out of school hours. Be aware that some types of sun cream may act as a trigger.
- Encourage involvement in extracurricular activities.
- Arrange meetings with a careers specialist to identify appropriate career pathways and to organise subject selection and work placements.

## Classroom approach to eczema

- Encourage the student to remove their jumper when indoors or during sport.
- Allow the student to have a drink bottle on their desk.
- Remind the student not to sit near a heater or in direct sunlight.
- Offer the student cotton surfaces to sit on (cotton-covered chairs, cotton mats on carpet, cotton cushions).
- Provide soap-free wash products.
- Provide access to wet towels/wipes to apply directly to affected skin.
- Keep the student active to divert attention from the itch.
- The student may require short rest breaks to assist with issues of concentration and fatigue that may result from disrupted sleep patterns.



- Discuss a discreet signal/sign to encourage the student to apply a cool compress or moisturiser to minimise itch and/or organise a card that enables the student to leave the class to apply the aforementioned. Students can find it extremely difficult to refrain from itching.
- The student may benefit from wearing gloves when working or playing with various mediums such as paint, glue or sand. If a student has been playing in sand, ensure the sand is washed off gently and not left under clothing such as socks.
- Negotiate maximum participation in physical activities, with consideration of eczema; the student may need to apply moisturiser before and after swimming.
- Class education about eczema in consultation with the student and family may assist with possible adverse reactions from peers.

## Contacts: RCH Education Institute and Dermatology Department RCH

*The RCH Education Institute and Dermatology Department RCH encourage schools to contact us should they require further information.*

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## References

Department of Education, Victoria 2006, Department of Education, viewed May 2007, [www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/wellbeing/welfare/itsnotoktobeaway.htm](http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/wellbeing/welfare/itsnotoktobeaway.htm)

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