



ECZEMA SCHOOL AND DAYCARE GUIDE

2021 EDITION

INTRODUCTION

While eczema can be challenging for sufferers of all ages, it can be especially difficult for children to understand and manage. This resource may be helpful for families, teachers, daycare providers, and anyone who cares for a child living with eczema.

WHAT IS ECZEMA?

The word “eczema” is often used to describe the condition called atopic dermatitis (AD), which is the more common form of eczema. The terms eczema and AD are often used interchangeably. AD is a skin condition that can be itchy and cause flare ups of skin rashes, redness, and patches that can crack, ooze, and bleed. The condition can range from mild to severe, and for children with more severe forms of AD, the condition can be very uncomfortable and negatively impact daily life.

Eczema is very itchy and children with eczema frequently scratch their skin, which further damages the skin and makes the condition worse. Children with eczema can also experience ‘flares’ in which their condition can worsen, followed by periods where it may get better. Flares can be triggered by environmental factors and each person may have different triggers. Common triggers include dust, pet dander, sweating during exercise, overheating, bathing in hot water, changes in temperature/ weather, certain fabrics, certain fragrances, and certain soaps/cleansers. For some people with eczema, their condition can flare without a known trigger.

HOW DOES ECZEMA AFFECT BEHAVIOUR?

Eczema can be very uncomfortable as the skin can be very itchy, irritated, and painful. This can negatively impact the mood and behaviour of the child who is suffering. The child can seem restless and irritable and may have a limited attention span and/or lack of focus. Many children with eczema also have difficulty with sleep due to their condition, which can leave the child chronically tired, and impact their ability to focus and concentrate.

WHAT IS THE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF ECZEMA?

The physical symptoms of eczema can change a child’s appearance and impact their self-esteem and confidence. The child may worry about looking different, and fear being bullied or teased. Eczema can cause children to sit out of certain activities or sports. Exercise and sweating may trigger a flare, and in more severe cases, even the act of physical activity can cause the child’s skin to crack and bleed.

TIPS FOR TEACHERS AND DAYCARE PROVIDERS

UNDERSTAND SCRATCHING: Children with eczema will scratch frequently. Avoid telling them not to scratch (as this isn't helpful), instead offer assistance. Showing empathy can help to minimize the distress associated with a flare. Offer moisturizer or provide a distraction to shift the child's attention away from the itch.

FOSTER AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT: An anti-bullying curriculum and inclusive classroom practices help all children and foster a secure environment for children with eczema.

AVOID TEMPERATURE EXTREMES: Children with eczema may prefer to sit away from windows or radiators and should avoid overheating during physical activities.

KEEP A CLEAN CLASSROOM: Regular cleaning of dust and regular vacuuming of carpets can help to reduce triggers. Children can be encouraged to wear light clothing, but garments with long sleeves and pants may also be helpful to reduce contact with potential irritants.

COMMUNICATE WITH PARENTS: Work closely with parents to help outline and clarify your role while the child is in your care. Daycare providers and nannies may have a unique role in the care of children with eczema, such as caring for the child's skin or applying moisturizer. Be aware of potential triggers and understand the importance of distraction to help children cope with itch. Parents and staff should develop a clear plan and expectations when providing childcare for a child with eczema.

DISCUSS ALLERGIES: Many children with AD (but not all) may also live with allergies. If a child has allergies, parents and teachers should discuss them and provide alternatives for children with allergies.

ECZEMA CHECKLIST

A child with eczema may benefit from having some of the following items on hand when they are at school. Work with your child's doctor to develop a plan to manage your child's eczema.

- Moisturizing cream
- Gentle hand soap (if the student cannot tolerate the school's hand soap)
- Cotton gloves (for handling materials which may be irritating to the skin)
- A list of potential triggers to avoid



TIPS FOR PARENTS TO HELP KIDS PREPARE FOR SCHOOL

WORK WITH YOUR CHILD'S TEACHER: Discuss your child's eczema including known triggers, the impact that it is having on your child, and what you have found works best for management. Each child is unique and together you can brainstorm what will work best for your child in the context of their classroom and make a plan for circumstances that might require special attention (e.g. projects that include use of potential triggers/irritants, physical education class, etc.).

ENCOURAGE ACCEPTANCE: Work with your child to accept their eczema as a chronic condition, and provide them with strategies to help manage their condition during a flare.

DISCUSS FEELINGS: Teasing and social isolation can be common; however, parents can take proactive steps to help the child feel confident.

DRESS FOR SUCCESS: Children with eczema may prefer to dress in light cotton layers. Clothing like uniforms may pose a challenge depending on the fabric and type of garment. Work with school administration to find a uniform that is suitable for your child. Outdoor play in colder months should include protective clothing, such as hats and mittens when needed.

WORK WITH YOUR CHILD'S DOCTOR: If you have any questions or concerns related to your child's eczema, contact their doctor to ask your questions. Seek additional help if needed; sometimes a therapist or counsellor can help your child to articulate their feelings and cope with those feelings. There is no shame in reaching out for this type of help.

SUMMARY

Parents, teachers, and daycare providers can work together to build a plan that will help children with eczema. For additional support and information, visit eczemahelp.ca.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ESC sincerely thanks the following individuals for sharing their expertise and insights for this resource:

Dr. Simon Nigen MD, FRCPC (Dermatologist)

Dr. Wingfield Rehmus MD, MPH, FAAD
(Dermatologist)

Shawn Reynolds PhD, RPsych (Psychologist)

Melissa Sweet MEd, BCBA
(Behavioural Analyst)

DISCLAIMER: Information provided in this resource does not constitute medical advice and is not intended to be used as a diagnostic tool. The information is up-to-date at time of publication. All medications, interventions, and treatment plans have risks and benefits, and it is important that individuals discuss their or their child's specific health care needs with a qualified health care professional.



www.eczemahelp.ca