

Eczema information for schools and nurseries

What is eczema?

Eczema is a condition that makes skin itchy. In lighter skin, eczema may look red. In darker skin, eczema may look grey, purple or brown. The skin can be dry and sometimes flaky. The main problem is itch, which causes children with eczema to scratch. This can damage the skin further and cause more itching. Itching can make a child very distressed and lead to poor sleep.

What causes eczema?

There is no single cause of eczema. We know that eczema can run in families, so a child with a family history of eczema, asthma or hay fever may be more at risk of developing eczema. It is usually caused by a mixture of things, including how the skin works, and the child's surroundings. Eczema is not contagious – you can't catch it.

How is eczema treated?

The main treatment is regularly applying moisturising creams (emollients) to protect the skin's barrier. Flare control creams (usually steroid creams) are sometimes necessary too. It is also important to avoid things that can set off flare-ups of eczema. Soaps, wearing wool next to the skin, overheating and contact with water and dust can make eczema worse for some children.

What are the main problems at nursery or school?

Friendships

Eczema is not infectious but this common misunderstanding can be hurtful. If the eczema is visible then it is important the other children understand that they can't catch it. Explaining that a child with eczema is just like everyone else, but with itchy sensitive skin, can help.

Preventing flare-ups of eczema

A child with eczema might need help with remembering to use special soap, or with applying creams or reminding them to avoid things that make the eczema worse – see separate sheet.

Visit the National Eczema society website for more information about eczema, including class activities, at: <http://www.eczema.org/eczema-at-school>