

2 Eczema

How can I support a student with eczema?

- ✓ Ask the student and their family directly how you can help. Take this opportunity to listen to their individual needs.
- ✓ Ask the student if there is a particular time of day where they become itchy and how you can help at that time.
- ✓ If a student is continually scratching, encourage techniques that limit trauma and further damage to the skin such as a cool compresses to the itchy area or pinching unaffected skin nearby. Distraction techniques can also be effective.
- ✓ Discuss eczema triggers with the student's parents and how to best avoid them.
- ✓ During warmer weather, maintain a cool learning environment to help limit flare-ups which can be triggered by heat and sweat.
- ✓ Provide the opportunity for them to discuss their condition with the class if they wish to do so. They may prefer the teacher provides information to the class. This can allow their peers to ask questions in a productive setting.
- ✓ Immediately address any teasing and bullying. Provide education to any students saying harmful things and offer effective support for the affected student.
- ✓ Recognize their interests and acknowledge their successes in the classroom and in social settings.

OVERVIEW

Eczema is an umbrella term for types of dermatitis (inflamed skin), with the most common type being atopic dermatitis. The terms atopic dermatitis and eczema are often used interchangeably. Eczema is a common skin condition that usually begins in childhood and causes very itchy skin and rashes. It usually affects the elbow creases, knee creases, hands, and the face but can affect any part of the body. Some children grow out of eczema, but some will have it for life.

Eczema can be associated with other allergic conditions such as asthma and hay fever. Triggers can include dry skin, heat, sweat, certain foods, pets, dust, and recent colds or skin infections.

There is no cure for eczema, but there are several treatments that can improve the symptoms of itching and irritation. Topical creams and ointments are very important in eczema to keep the skin hydrated. Some students may take pills or receive injections to help their symptoms.



What symptoms does someone with eczema experience?

Students with eczema will likely experience very significant **itchiness of their skin**. They may scratch their skin until it bleeds, which increases the risk of skin infections. If uncontrolled, their itch may be distracting to them during class time.

Students may feel self-conscious or anxious about their visible skin condition, particularly if they experience teasing and bullying from classmates.

What special measures might students with eczema need?

The child may need **application of creams and moisturizers throughout the day** and should be given time and privacy to do this. It may be helpful for them to have a personal supply of moisturizer with them to apply as needed. They may also need to take oral medications during the day.

Students with hand involvement may benefit from use of hypoallergenic hand soap. Hand sanitizer, when required, may be drying due to its alcohol content (the CDC recommends hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol). It is important to encourage application of moisturizer immediately after hand washing and hand sanitizing to maintain skin hydration.

Certain arts and crafts materials may be irritating to the skin – if this is the case, students may need to wear cotton gloves or participate in an alternate activity. There may also be worsening of the rash and itching with outdoor play and sports due to sweating, heat, and pollen. They may need to take breaks, play indoors, or participate outside in a different way (e.g. scorekeeper, referee).

Students may need flexibility with school uniform policies, as some fabric may irritate the skin. Cotton clothing is preferred. Carpets and chairs can be very irritating to the skin of students with eczema, so it can be beneficial to have a cotton covering to sit on. Students may also have dietary restrictions due to food triggers, which should be discussed with the parents.

Is it contagious?

No, eczema is not contagious. Other students will not get eczema with physical contact or play.



SOURCES & ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- > **Tools for School: An Educator's Guide**
National Eczema Association
<https://nationaleczema.org/tools-for-school-for-educators/>
- > **Tools for School: A Parent's Guide**
National Eczema Association
<https://mk0nationalecze417sw.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/ToolsForSchoolComplete.pdf>
- > **Eczema at School Pack**
National Eczema Society
<http://www.eczema.org/eczema-at-schools>
- > **"Live Your Life"**
National Eczema Society
<http://www.eczema.org/information-for-teenagers>
- > **Back-To School Classroom Care Kit**
National Eczema Association
<https://nationaleczema.org/back-to-school-classroom-kit-students-eczema/>
- > **How To Explain Eczema By Age**
A Children's House
<https://achildrenshouse.org/how-to-explain-eczema/>
- > **Dry Skin Relief from COVID-19 Handwashing**
American Academy of Dermatology
<https://www.aad.org/public/everyday-care/skin-care-basics/dry/coronavirus-handwashing>

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