

Eczema – A guide for health professionals

Eczema is common and affects about 30% of Australian children. It is also referred to as atopic dermatitis and atopic eczema. Eczema is often called the itch that rashes because the skins starts to itch often before a rash appears.

The more you itch, the worse the rash becomes. It is important to treat the eczema flare as soon as it occurs. Children with eczema have dry, itchy skin and typically, a moisturiser is recommended for the dry skin and a topical corticosteroid for the inflammation.

Managing eczema

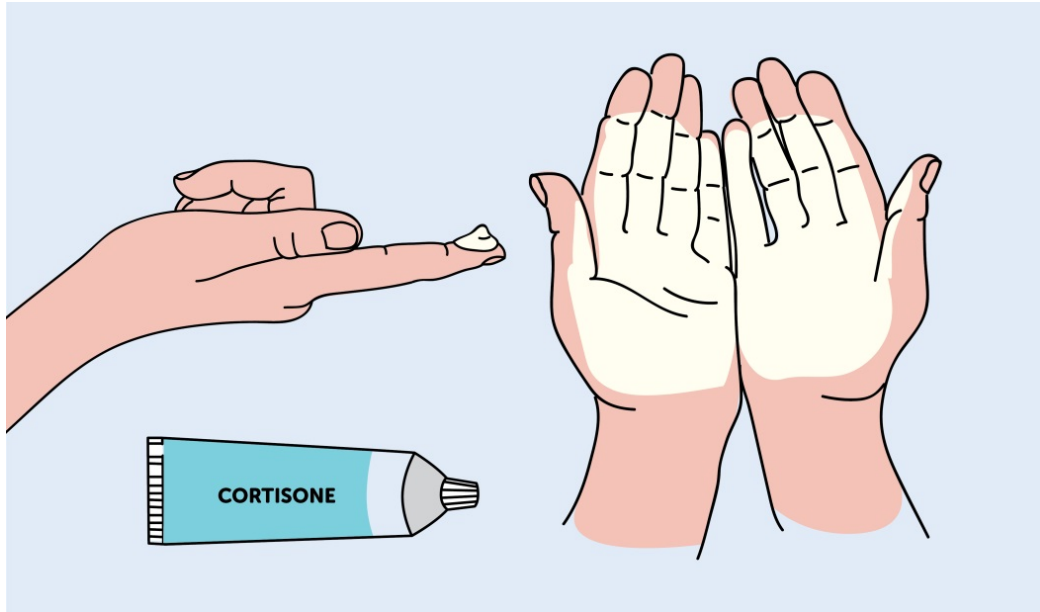
Moisturising and bathing

- Moisturise the whole body every day, even when there is no eczema. Ointments and thick moisturisers are better than lotions as they are more hydrating and are less likely to sting.
- Bathe daily (where possible) and always apply moisturiser to damp skin after the bath or shower, regardless of whether the skin is dry or not. Short baths or showers that are not too hot (less than 32 degrees Celsius), are recommended.
- Gently remove any eczema crusts in the bath. This helps the creams and ointments to be more effective.
- Avoid soap products and bubble bath as these dry the skin. Soap-free wash is preferred. Bath oil can be added if the skin feels very dry.
- Use a shampoo for sensitive skin when washing hair.

Treating eczema flares

- Apply cortisone as soon as there are signs of eczema flare (redness and increased itch) and continue to apply once daily (or as directed) until the flare is completely gone and the skin feels smooth and soft.
- Cortisone ointments are more moisturising and less likely to sting than creams.
- Apply cortisone liberally (i.e. enough to cover all the inflamed areas, not just the worst areas). The fingertip unit can be used as a guide. One fingertip unit is enough to cover an area of skin twice the size of a flat adult hand with the fingers together. For example, if the area of skin to be treated is the size of four flat adult hands, two fingertip units of cortisone should be applied each time.





Fingertip unit

Illustration used with permission from National Allergy Strategy 2018.

- Cortisone can be used on broken skin and excoriated areas as well as intact skin.
- Apply cortisone again as soon as there is another flare. Typically the eczema flare should clear within 1-2 weeks for most children.

General tips

- Avoid overheating – children with eczema get hot quickly and this can make eczema itchier.
- Don't have heaters in bedrooms.
- Don't overdress babies and children with eczema, particularly at night.
- Keep fingernails short and clean to help limit damage to the skin from scratching.

Advice for child health nurses to offer to parents

When should I take my child to see a GP?

- If you are worried about your child's eczema.
- If your child is waking at night because of the eczema.
- If your child is not going to school, kindy or day care because of the eczema.
- If you run out of eczema creams or ointments.
- If your child's skin looks infected (e.g. red, painful, weeping, crusted, blistered).
- If the eczema is not clear or much better within 2 weeks of following your management plan.

Helpful eczema resources

National Allergy Strategy website (www.preventallergies.org.au)

- [Nip allergies in the bub website](#) - includes resources for managing eczema (including videos) and preventing food allergies.

Eczema videos

- How to apply moisturiser for eczema
- Using cortisone creams or ointments for eczema
- How to apply wet dressings for eczema
- Using bleach baths for eczema

Eczema fact sheets and infographics

- [How to use bleach baths](#)
- [How to use wet dressings](#)
- [Top tips for managing eczema](#)

Child and Adolescent Health Service

- [Caring for your child's eczema Health Facts](#)
- [Eczema Health Facts](#)
- [Bleach baths for children with eczema Health Facts](#)

Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (www.allergy.org.au)

- ASCIA Information for patients, consumers and carers - Eczema (atopic dermatitis) <https://www.allergy.org.au/patients/skin-allergy/eczema>

Additional resources for health professionals

Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (www.allergy.org.au)

- ASCIA paediatric atopic dermatitis (eczema) e-training for health professionals <https://etraininghp.ascia.org.au>



Government of **Western Australia**
Child and Adolescent Health Service



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