

# ECZEMA

## School and Daycare Guide



[www.eczemahelp.ca](http://www.eczemahelp.ca)



## A Message from the Executive Director

### Dear Parents, Teachers, and Daycare Providers,

An estimated 17% of Canadian children suffer from eczema. A child living with eczema experiences uncomfortable physical symptoms such as pain and itch. While eczema is not contagious, symptoms include dry itchy skin with redness, scaling, rashes, and open sores. In addition, the disease has social and emotional consequences. These make life even more challenging for children who are already living with a difficult chronic disease.

This resource may also be helpful for principals, daycare staff, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and anyone who cares for a child living with eczema. Understanding the burden of this disease, and raising awareness about the condition, is the first step in caring for those living with eczema.

Please contact the Eczema Society of Canada with any questions or for more information.

Sincerely,

*Amanda Cresswell-Melville*

Amanda Cresswell-Melville  
Executive Director, Eczema Society of Canada

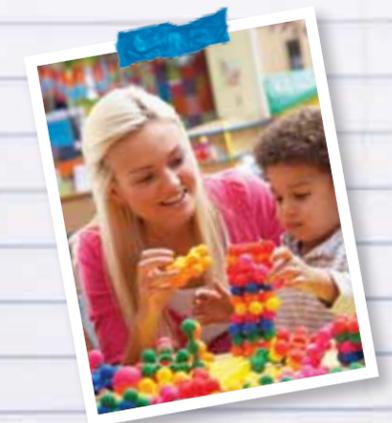
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# Introduction

This guide is to help parents, teachers, and daycare providers understand the unique needs and challenges of children living with eczema, and to offer information and strategies for overcoming these challenges.

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### What is eczema?

Many Canadian children live with eczema, a chronic skin condition, characterized by itchy, red, inflamed skin. This skin disease can be mild, but can also become very severe, painful, and life altering. Having eczema can greatly impact the social and emotional life of the child. Children who have this form of eczema are much more likely to suffer with asthma and allergies.

**Why does a child get eczema?** Eczema is not contagious. A child cannot get eczema by playing with another child who has the condition. It is not completely understood how and why a child develops eczema. There are some genetic factors that make someone more likely to develop eczema. Families with eczema are also likely to have asthma and allergies as well. Also, children with eczema seem to have a skin barrier that does not work as well as it should and their immune system is quite sensitive to irritants. Some children develop eczema when they move to a new climate, or if they use a new soap (especially if it has perfume in it).

**What does eczema look like?** Eczema will look like a red rash, possibly raised and bumpy, and possibly with open sores where the skin has been scratched. Eczema is incredibly itchy, so you will most likely see the child itching and scratching the skin, particularly during times of stress. The act of itching further damages the skin and makes the eczema worse. Eczema is often referred to as the “itch that rashes” so it is possible the skin could look completely normal but feel itchy and then become red and rashy after scratching. This becomes the “itch-scratch cycle”.

**What triggers eczema flares?** When children encounter a “trigger” the eczema “flares” meaning the skin will become more itchy, red, bumpy, and scaly. Each person will have different triggers, however, some are more common than others. Common triggers include: dry skin, heat, dust, sweating, overheating from activity, irritants, allergens (including pet dander, pollens, and particular foods), and infections (like colds or skin infections). Stress can also be a trigger, especially for young children, as they can have difficulty identifying their stressors. The most common areas affected by eczema are the flexors (behind the elbows and the knees), around the neck, on the hands and the front of the ankles.



**Not all itching is eczema! If the child also has allergies and suddenly becomes intensely itchy do watch for hives or other symptoms (e.g. swelling of the face and lips, hives, difficulty breathing, diarrhea, vomiting, etc.) to ensure that the child is not having an allergic reaction.**

**How does it affect behaviour?** Eczema can cause a constant itch, accompanied by pain, and open skin sores. This, of course, can negatively impact the mood and behaviour of the suffering child. Sometimes, a child can even exhibit behaviours similar to ADHD, such as a limited attention span, restlessness, and lack of focus, during an eczema flare. When in pain, tolerance to demands can be lower. As a result, a child may be more likely to engage in tantrums, may not follow instructions, or appear weepy. Also, many children with eczema have difficulty sleeping due to itch and so they are chronically tired.

**What is the social and emotional impact?** Eczema changes the child's appearance and this can be very stressful for a child. The child may fear being bullied or teased and may worry about looking different. Children have to cope with a lack of understanding from others, the unfounded fear that the child is contagious and even have to miss out on certain activities or sports because it could cause a flare.

It can also be difficult for teachers and parents to understand the torment of constantly itching skin and painful skin lesions.

**Can eczema be managed?** Yes! While there is no cure for eczema, with proper skin care and medical treatment and understanding from family, friends and teachers, children with eczema can care for their skin and live happy and healthy lives. Bathing and frequent moisturizing are the cornerstone of eczema care. Children with eczema may also need to use prescription products. These can typically be managed at home or before and after school hours. However, if these are needed throughout the school day, parents and teachers can work together to create a plan to ensure the child is cared for during the school day.



**Dry skin is the most common cause of an eczema flare, so moisturizing the skin, many times a day, is one of the most important things the child can do to help reduce flares and improve the health of the skin.**

**How does eczema impact the family?** Whatever impacts one child in a family, impacts the entire family. Parents have a lot to manage – medical appointments, treatments, and time-consuming daily skin care. Children can rebel against the daily (or many times daily) skin care routine. Treatment can also be a financial burden. It is not surprising that feelings of helplessness and being overwhelmed can be common in parents of children with eczema. Lack of sleep, stress, anger, feelings of guilt, exhaustion, and depression can also be common.

**There is hope.** The good news is that eczema can be managed. It does take some time to get a good skin care routine in place at home, but putting in the time to get organized can pay off in the long run. Children with eczema live very happy and normal lives.

## Introduction

We know how difficult it can be to manage eczema and live with this condition in your family: sleepless nights, behaviour disruptions from the discomfort and pain, feeling helpless while watching your child suffer, and struggles with topical treatments and daily skin care routines which can be messy, time consuming and expensive.

## Your Role

As a parent, you have an important role as your child's advocate at school so that the school can provide necessary support, teachers know how to handle challenges that might arise during the day, and all involved can work to build the best environment for your child. Daycare providers and teachers want to help. Make them an ally and work together to create a plan that will help your child to live comfortably, not only physically, but socially and emotionally as well.

## Management at School

Your child may need to apply moisturizer throughout the day, or when they have an acute flare during the school day. It is recommended that they keep moisturizer in their school bag or a small tube in the lunch bag so that your child can apply throughout the day.



AS A PARENT THERE ARE THINGS YOU CAN DO TO HELP:



### Become Educated

Learn more about eczema by visiting [www.eczema-help.ca](http://www.eczema-help.ca) and talk to your child and his or her teacher to learn how the condition affects your particular child.



### Talk to Your Child

Open communication can be as helpful as your medical treatments. Let your child express his or her feelings and share about any issues that may arise at school. Talk to your child about their role in eczema care, and remind them that they can control this condition and take action.



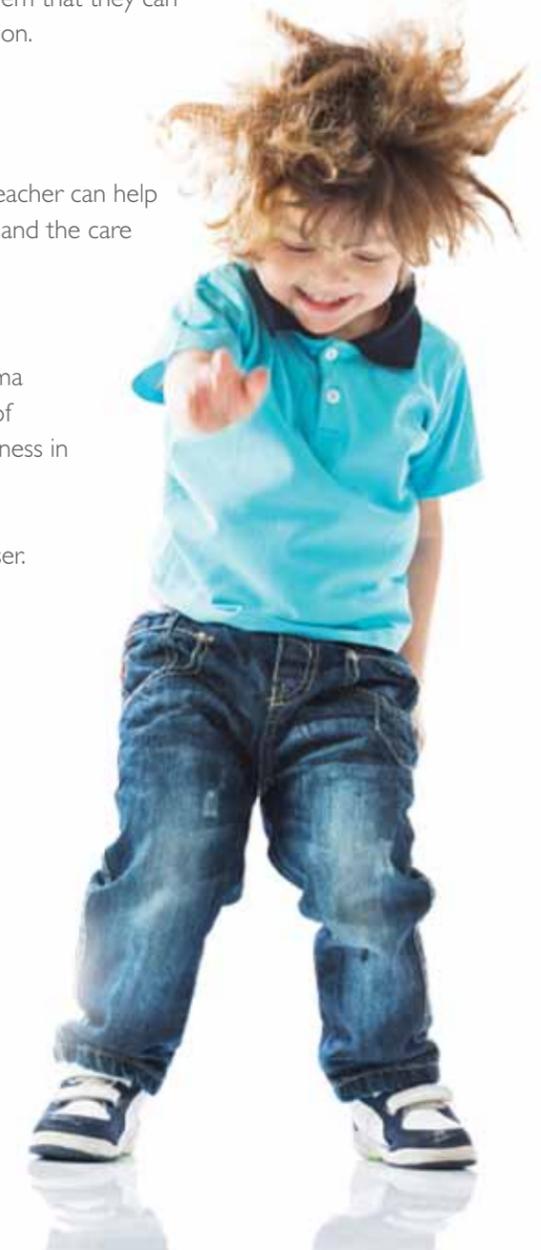
### Talk to Your Child's Teachers

Communicating with your child's teacher can help him or her to understand eczema, and the care that your child will need at school.



### Raise Awareness

You can talk to others about eczema and the impact it has on the lives of sufferers. You can even raise awareness in your own school community or in the classroom with an "Eczema Awareness Day" or hold a fundraiser.



### Talk to the teacher about:

- ECZEMA AND THIS RESOURCE – Share this resource and the teacher guide, and offer to provide additional copies for other teachers in the school.
- AVOIDING TEMPERATURE EXTREMES – Children with eczema should sit away from windows or radiators, and should avoid overheating during physical activities. Outdoor play in colder months should always include hats, mittens and proper protection.
- KEEPING A CLEAN CLASSROOM – Regular cleaning of dust, chalk 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 irritants such as carpets.
- UNDERSTANDING THE SCRATCHING – Children with eczema will scratch frequently. Avoid telling them not to scratch. An application of a moisturizer or a cool wash cloth can be helpful during a flare to cool the skin and help relieve the itch. Empathy can also help to minimize the distress associated with a flare up.

### Talk to your child about:

- ACCEPTING ECZEMA AND MOVING FORWARD WITH AN ACTION PLAN TO MANAGE THE CONDITION WHILE AT SCHOOL – This will help to take the embarrassment out of eczema and will help them to feel in control of the condition.
- FEELINGS RELATED TO ECZEMA – Teasing and social isolation can be common; however, parents can take proactive steps to help the child feel confident and be a leader in accepting others who are different.
- NEEDING TO GET ADDITIONAL HELP – Sometimes a therapist or counsellor can help your child to articulate feelings and cope with those feelings. There is no shame in reaching out for this type of help. Perhaps your child can find an ally at school, a particular teacher or counsellor, who can be of assistance if the child is being teased or is having challenges due to an eczema flare.



### Eczema Care at School – Checklist

THE STUDENT MAY NEED THE FOLLOWING ITEMS ON HAND:

- ✓ Moisturizing cream
- ✓ Gentle hand soap (if the student cannot tolerate the school's hand soap)
- ✓ Cotton gloves (for handling materials that may irritate the skin – if required)
- ✓ Adhesive bandages
- ✓ Medications and written instructions on medications required at school
- ✓ A list of triggers to avoid and other ways to keep eczema under control at school

### Recommended Parent & Teacher/Daycare Communication

This list of questions may help your child's teacher, daycare provider or nanny better understand your child's eczema.

**Child's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Parent Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

- ✓ Does the child's eczema require the application of a moisturizer during the school day?
- ✓ Does the child require special hand soap in the classroom and the restroom?
- ✓ Are there any substances that make the eczema worse? E.g. sand play, water play, etc.
- ✓ Are there any foods that the child should avoid?
- ✓ Does the child sleep well at night despite the eczema?
- ✓ Some successful strategies for reducing itching and scratching are...
- ✓ \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ \_\_\_\_\_



## A Student with Eczema

Eczema is a common skin condition that usually affects children. Some students have only very little involvement, but for others eczema is a chronic disease that causes many challenges. Students with eczema often have very dry itchy skin. They may have difficulty sleeping at night due to the itch and can be distracted during class because of fatigue or itch. They often have sensitive skin that will get worse if they use soaps, touch certain art supplies, or are exposed to pets in the classroom. While there is no cure for eczema, it can be managed with medications and some changes to the environment. Because students with eczema spend many hours at school each day, it is important for their teachers to be part of the team in helping to meet their needs.

## Eczema Management at School

Students in your classroom who have eczema may need to apply moisturizer throughout the day, or when they have an acute flare during the school day. Bandages or wrapping are sometimes needed for eczema management. Children with eczema may be distracted by the itch, exhausted from missing sleep, or embarrassed by the appearance of their skin or teasing they have experienced. Speak to the parents if you have any questions or concerns.



AS A TEACHER, THERE ARE THINGS YOU CAN DO TO HELP:

### Become Educated

Learn more about eczema by visiting [www.eczemahelp.ca](http://www.eczemahelp.ca) or talk to your student and his or her parents about how the condition affects your particular student.



### Foster an Inclusive Classroom

An anti-bullying curriculum and inclusive classroom practices help all students and foster a secure environment for children with eczema. Recognize and celebrate differences. Using resources from our recommended reading list can be a great way to incorporate literacy, build self-esteem and increase the understanding and tolerance of one another.



### Raise Awareness

Talk to others about eczema and the impact it has on the lives of sufferers. You can even raise awareness in your own school community with an "Eczema Awareness Day". You can invite the student to participate in awareness building by telling classmates about the disease.

## Understand Behaviours Related to Eczema

Eczema can affect a student's behaviour. Some children describe it as their skin burning while others say it feels like being stung by 1000 bees at the same time. This type of constant irritation and pain may cause the student to feel restless, frustrated, irritable, and may cause them to become disruptive. This can often mimic the behaviours of attention difficulty.

## Recommended Reading AGES 3–12

### DON'T LAUGH AT ME

Written by Steve Seskin, Allen Shamblin;  
Illustrator: Glin Dibley - Random House Children's Books

*Do you wear glasses? Ever been picked last for the team? Afraid you'll be called on in class? Don't laugh at me. Don't call me names. This is not a book for whiners, but a new language that will give you the words you need to take charge and stop the cycle of teasing. Read it, sing it, and cheer!*

### I LIKE MYSELF!

Written by Karen Beaumont;  
Illustrator: David Catrow - Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

*High on energy and imagination, this ode to self-esteem encourages kids to appreciate everything about themselves—inside and out.*

### STEPHANIE'S PONYTAIL

Written by Robert N. Munsch;  
Illustrator: Michael Martchenko - ANNICK PRESS

*A little girl is determined to strike a blow for nonconformity. Her strong female voice will speak to many, asserting the importance of individuality and independent thought.*



## Help Facilitate an Eczema Friendly Classroom

Helping to facilitate a healthy classroom for students with eczema is the most important thing you can do:

1. ALLOW FOR GENTLE SKIN CARE AND MOISTURIZING – Allow the student to bring a gentle hand cleanser to school, as typical institutional hand cleansers may aggravate eczema or cause a flare. Permit students with eczema to carry and apply moisturizers. Students may need to be excused to use the rest room to apply moisturizer to areas of the body covered by clothing, or they may simply prefer privacy for areas such as the face or hands. Students with eczema can be extremely self-conscious about their condition, so it is important that we respect their privacy and are sensitive to their feelings.
2. AVOID TEMPERATURE EXTREMES – Students with eczema should sit away from windows or radiators, and should avoid overheating during physical activities. Outdoor play in colder months should always include hats and mittens. A thin layer of Vaseline on the cheeks or affected areas of younger children may be helpful with facial eczema.
3. KEEP A CLEAN CLASSROOM – Regular cleaning of dust, chalk dust, and regular vacuuming of carpets can help to reduce triggers. Students can be encouraged to wear light clothing, but garments with long sleeves and pants may also be helpful to reduce contact with irritants such as carpeting.
4. WORK WITH UNIFORM POLICIES – Students with eczema may not tolerate certain fabrics, such as wools and synthetics. Parents and school officials can discuss uniform concessions that will create a balance between complying with uniform regulations and not worsening the eczema. Students with eczema need to stay cool and avoid overheating. Rules need to be flexible for students with eczema, so as to respect their special needs.
5. CONSIDER FIELD TRIPS – Activities that might be benign for some students can be problematic for students with eczema. Field trips to the zoo or involving animals might need some extra planning for students with eczema. Speak to parents when unusual learning experiences arise, so that you may create a plan for the student. Even animals visiting the classroom may be problematic.
6. BE UNDERSTANDING OF SCRATCHING – Students with eczema will scratch frequently. Avoid telling them not to scratch, instead offer support and understanding. Some students find it helpful to rub the skin, so as to bring relief without damaging the skin; however, even this can cause skin damage if it is done forcefully and often. An application of a moisturizer or a cool wash cloth can be helpful during a flare to help cool the skin and relieve the itch. Some students can be easily distracted from scratching and even feel less itchy when distracted. Active engagement in classroom activities and active learning that involves doing things with their hands can be helpful. Empathy can also help to minimize the distress associated with a flare.
7. TALK TO PARENTS – Keep lines of communication open, ask any questions you may have, and discuss ways to cope with the itching during the school day.



Daycare providers and nannies have a unique role in the care of children with eczema. Depending on your specific situation, you may have a very involved role in caring for children with eczema, including: bathing, medication applications, and moisturizing.

- ✓ Work together with parents to create an action plan for the child.
- ✓ Have parents explain and even demonstrate routines and work together as you learn.
- ✓ Ask questions and communicate openly, such as reporting how the child is responding to their management plan or any feelings they share related to their eczema.

### Eczema Care Checklist

THE PARENTS MAY NEED TO PROVIDE THE FOLLOWING ITEMS TO THE DAYCARE:

- ✓ Moisturizing cream
- ✓ Gentle hand soap (if your child cannot tolerate the daycare's hand soap)
- ✓ Cotton gloves (for handling materials that may irritate the skin – if required)
- ✓ Adhesive bandages
- ✓ If the child is still wearing diapers, ask parents to bring in their own gentle diaper wipes as some brands may sting the skin.
- ✓ Medications and written instructions on medications required, triggers to avoid, and other ways to keep eczema under control.
- ✓ \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ \_\_\_\_\_

## Daycare Action Plan

The daycare can do the following things to help:

- Keep classrooms clean, sweeping floors and vacuuming carpets regularly.
- Keep dust to a minimum. Avoid using chalk boards, or chalking crafts, as the dust can exacerbate eczema and possibly asthma symptoms.
- Provide or allow the use of gentle hand soap at classroom sinks and in washrooms.
- Have materials on hand for crafts such as cotton gloves (for handling materials that may irritate the skin – if required), non-latex gloves (for wet work, such as papier mache), and utensils such as popsicle sticks for glue or clay work, to avoid contact with the skin.
- Remember that sensory play, such as play in rice, oat or water tables may cause flares or irritation for children with eczema. Substances such as play dough or clay may also be irritating; however, working with parents on an action plan will ensure that strategies are employed so that the child may be accommodated, and still participate in activities.
- Keep adhesive bandages and tissues handy.
- Keep a written log of how often medication and/or moisturizer is used during the day. So that the parent has an idea of what happened with the skin while they were away from their child.



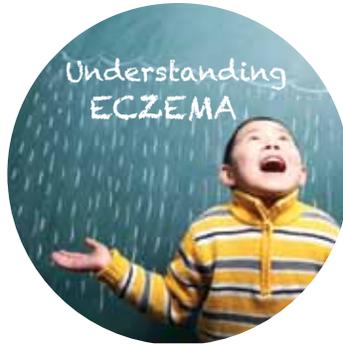
## Help Facilitate an Eczema Friendly Environment

Helping to facilitate a healthy environment for children with eczema is the most important thing you can do.

1. GENTLE SKIN CARE AND MOISTURIZING – The child should use gentle hand cleansers for hand washing after using the washroom, before eating, and after arts, crafts, and messy activities. Typical institutional hand cleansers may aggravate eczema or cause a flare. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers can sting or cause increased drying of the skin. Young children may need help in applying their moisturizer. Discuss this with parents prior to use, and follow any policies of the daycare facility with regard to the use of medications, or any special needs policies that might be in place.
2. AVOID TEMPERATURE EXTREMES – Children with eczema should sit away from windows or radiators, and should avoid overheating during physical activities. Outdoor play in colder months should always include hats and mittens, and a thin layer of Vaseline on the cheeks or affected areas of younger children may be helpful with facial eczema.
3. KEEP THE PLAY-SPACE CLEAN – Regular cleaning of dust, chalk dust, and frequent vacuuming of carpeting can help to reduce triggers. Children should be encouraged to wear light clothing, but garments with long sleeves and pants may also be helpful to reduce contact with irritants such as carpets.
4. OUTDOOR PLAY ROUTINES – Many daycares/nannies wisely apply sunscreen during the spring, summer, and fall months before outdoor play. Speak to parents about a sunscreen that is suitable for their child. In the winter months, some children may need a thin layer of petroleum jelly applied to their cheeks before going outdoors. Discuss these possible needs with parents.
5. OUTINGS – Activities that might be benign for some children can be problematic for children with eczema. Field trips, such as visiting the zoo or a water park, might need some extra planning for children with eczema. Speak to parents when unusual learning experiences arise, so that you may create a plan for the child. Even animals visiting the classroom may be problematic. Open communication is most often helpful.
6. BE UNDERSTANDING OF SCRATCHING – Children with eczema will scratch frequently. Avoid telling them not to scratch, instead offer understanding and support. Some children find it helpful to rub the skin, so as to bring relief without damaging the skin, but even this can be damaging if done with enough force for a long time. An application of a moisturizer or a cool wash cloth can be helpful during a flare to help cool the skin and relieve the itch. Empathy can also help to minimize the distress associated with a flare.
7. TALK TO PARENTS – Keep lines of communication open, ask any questions you may have, and discuss ways to cope with the itching during the school day.

**Remember that young children in daycare will need additional care, such as application of medical treatments or moisturizer. Speak to the child's parents about the specific care needed.**





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[www.eczemahelp.ca](http://www.eczemahelp.ca)

*The medical content and recommendations contained within this guide are based on current treatment recommendations by experts in eczema treatment, however the information contained within should never be used as an exclusive treatment course. Always review your treatment plan with your own physician.*

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