

Eczema



Eczema is a chronic and complex itchy skin condition. But it is more than just that. Eczema can vary from a mild to moderate itch to an extremely itchy, painful and debilitating condition, with huge effects on quality of life. It can look very different in babies/children and teens/adults and in skin of colour. There is no cure for Eczema, but symptoms can be managed.



Health condition

- Causes itching skin and can lead to broken skin and infections
- Chronic condition impacting sleep, focus, and wellbeing
- Co-occurrence with asthma, hayfever, allergies, ADHD, and ASD
- Triggered or worsened by stress, environmental factors (dust mites, pollens, grasses), and weather changes (heat, cold, dry air)



Student population

2.8 million people in Australia have Eczema

Estimated to affect **800,000–1.2 million students**

One in five Australian children under 14 has eczema

One in three Australian children under six have Eczema

Increasing prevalence, particularly in developed countries like Australia



School absence patterns

- Absence pattern is typically intermittent and indefinite in length
- Frequent short-term absences due to flare-ups, infections, or medical appointments
- Cumulative absences from chronic sleep deprivation
- Severe cases may result in extended absences or homeschooling if environmental triggers at school cause frequent flares



Challenges for students

- Physical discomfort from itching disrupts daily activities
- Sleep deprivation can affect school attendance and performance
- Attention and concentration problems
- Increased anxiety and behavioural problems
- Bandages or rashes can affect self-esteem and peer relationships
- Social stigma, peer rejection and bullying due to misconceptions (e.g., 'contagious,' 'poor hygiene')
- Increased vulnerability to stressors and secondary illnesses



Challenges for families

- Sleep disruption due to nighttime caregiving
- Emotional and mental exhaustion, frustration, and isolation
- Parents extending leave or leaving work entirely to provide 24/7 care
- Families sometimes homeschool for years if school triggers severe flares
- Siblings can feel overlooked, tired, and have attention and concentration problems



What schools should know

- Eczema is not contagious and is not caused by poor hygiene practices
- Telling a student to stop scratching isn't helpful since they can't control it; instead, use distraction and symptom management
- Environmental considerations include adjusting dress codes and being mindful of heat, dust, grass, or other irritants that can trigger flare-ups
- Flexible accommodations involve recognising late arrivals due to sleep deprivation and allowing nurse's office visits or rest times as needed
- Develop individualised learning plans and adjustments in collaboration with parents and health professionals
- Mental health support should acknowledge anxiety and low self-esteem, providing psychological support and necessary resources
- Provide digital classroom access for continuity during absence

"It [Eczema] disrupts sleep in a big way; it disrupts focus, overall wellbeing, and affects every single part of a child's life and their family members. Kids with eczema really do struggle in school, and they miss out on things like social activities, and they face stigma and bullying."



Eczema Support
AUSTRALIA

Eczema Support Australia

A not-for-profit organisation that provides practical resources, advocacy, and a sense of community for Australians affected by eczema.

www.eczemasupport.org.au