The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) have written a series of leaflets to help children, young people and their families cope with allergic conditions. This leaflet describes the care that children and young people with eczema should receive.

If you find there are lots of terms on this leaflet that you don’t understand, you can download a copy of ‘Understanding the Language of Allergy’ from the RCPCH website www.rcpch.ac.uk/allergy.

Managing eczema
Eczema requires daily management, even when the skin is clear. Eczema can be mild, moderate, severe. The level of care is different depending on the severity of the eczema and health professionals call this stepping up and down. There is a table below to help you identify the different levels of eczema. Although most eczema is managed at home, severe eczema can become infected and this requires immediate hospitalisation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acute</th>
<th>Non Acute</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Severe eczema should be treated in hospital immediately if:</td>
<td>Managing severe eczema which is painful, or makes life difficult for your child and family</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Eczema is severely infected with bacteria</td>
<td>• Clear/Mild – itches sometimes, some redness and dryness</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Eczema (Herpeticum) is blistered or has lesions</td>
<td>• Moderate – itches quite often, keeps your child awake, red, broken skin made worse by scratching and localised skin thickening</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Your child has a fever caused by infected eczema</td>
<td>• Severe – itches all the time, keeps your child awake, covers large areas, broken skin made worse by scratching, larger areas of skin thickening, bleeding, oozing, cracking and skin colour changes</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Your child is not growing or developing properly because of their eczema</td>
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<tr>
<td>• There is a leaflet on how to deal with acute episodes of eczema</td>
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At the start what should you do?
Recognise that your child may have eczema eg a red itchy rash and dry skin
Talk to a health professional eg GP, pharmacist, nurse about what you should do next

What should the health professional do?
1. Recognise that your child has eczema or an eczema flare
2. Find out whether anything seems to make the eczema worse or better?
   You may be asked about irritants (e.g. washing products, toiletries, bathing) and triggers (e.g. foods, toiletries, pets, heat and cold) and what creams or lotions you are using
3. Help you to manage symptoms by providing a management plan or refer you to someone who can provide you with a management plan
4. If necessary, refer your child to a specialist clinic e.g. dermatologist (skin doctor), allergy specialist, paediatrician (children’s doctor), or to a GP, dietitian or nurse who can help

The health professional may use a questionnaire to help assess how severe the eczema is.
What the health professional will do next?
This may be at your local GP surgery, in a skin care clinic or an allergy clinic

The doctor or nurse will take a medical history of your child (and their family). They will be especially interested in symptoms which can be connected with allergy. You may be asked:

- how much your child’s eczema affects their sleep, and also how you all cope managing it
- whether food or other triggers seem to affect the eczema (Bring a note of times when or why eczema seemed to be better or worse if you can.)
- about other conditions related to eczema – asthma, allergic rhinitis (runny eyes and nose caused by allergic reactions eg pollen, animals, food, dust mites) and make sure you are getting medical care to manage them as well

The doctor or nurse should also:

- Look at your child’s skin
- Weigh and measure your child’s and see how they are developing
- Make sure that you understand which moisturises (emollients) and other creams to apply, where and when
- Prescribe steroids, medicated creams or special bandages for when the eczema gets worse (These are stronger creams which need to be used carefully and only where necessary)
- Show you how to use anything that has been prescribed
- Work with you to write a personalised management plan for you to take away. This plan will help you to recognise and avoid eczema triggers, know which treatment to use where and when (e.g. flares), and also when to get extra medical help e.g. if the eczema is infected

You should also receive advice about:

- how to get more information from patient groups and helpful websites recommended by the health professional

In some cases:

- if the flare-up is quite severe or the eczema infected, you may be asked to bring your child to stay in hospital – there is another leaflet about this.
- your child may need to be referred for more treatment and/or support e.g. to a more specialist clinic or to provide extra help managing the eczema at home or at nursery, school

What should you do to manage the symptoms?

1. Recognise that your child has eczema and know what a flare looks like
2. Follow your management plan and if you don’t have one ask your health professional to provide one
3. Apply moisturisers (emollients) to protect the skin even if it is clear
4. Avoid known irritants (e.g. soap, bath and shower products), other triggers (as above)
5. Find out more about managing eczema eg from patient support groups, websites recommended by the health professional
6. Seek medical help if the eczema does not improve or it gets worse
Care in the future

If your child’s eczema continues as they get older, the care they get should include:

- A review of their personalised management plan, helping you all to recognise, treat and manage eczema when it flares up
- Checking that you/your child knows how to apply the treatments and any medicated dressings
- A review of your child’s allergies.
- A review of their physical development – height, weight, what they eat and whether anything important is missing from their diet?
- Checking to see whether the long-term treatments are causing any problems
- Working out what to do when eczema affects your family life or limits your child’s ability to join in activities or progress at nursery or school
- Arranging counselling help for your child / the family if appropriate
- Supporting your child as they move onto secondary school and into adult healthcare
- Working with the young person to support them to live independently and manage their eczema with confidence in the future

At medical appointments you may be asked:

- If they have developed any new allergies which may affect their eczema,
- If they have they outgrown any old ones?
- What they eat and whether anything important is missing from their diet?
- If your child’s eczema is affecting your family life or limiting their progress in nursery or school and working out how to improve this

Your child’s doctor or nurse should contact the school or child care/nursery to:

- see how your child is getting on and help staff to provide everyday care for them

In some cases:

- your child may need to be referred to another clinic for their eczema and/or allergies

Where can you get further information?

Take a look at the RCPCH website: www.rcpch.ac.uk/allergy there are some resources here.

These websites might also help:

- Eczema society: www.eczema.org
- Skin Care Campaign: www.skincarecampaign.org
- NICE - patient info on eczema: http://guidance.nice.org.uk/CG57/PublicInfo/pdf/English