

Allergy New Zealand Media release



- Awareness campaign for the duration of Spring – September, October, November, December
- To highlight the burden of allergies which are a \$5 billion cost per annum
- Run by Allergy New Zealand, a national charity.

Recent studies show up to one in three (30%) of infants have eczema by 24 months of age. Eczema in infancy is a major predictor of allergies, and many of these children will go on to develop food allergies, allergic rhinitis and asthma. There is often a hereditary element, but experts say this does not explain the significant increase across all sectors of the population. Prevalence is also common in children and adolescents and particularly high - and severe - in Maori and Pacific children in New Zealand. A major factor is thought to be the way people with eczema react to *Staphylococcus aureus*, a bacterium that most people carry on their skin as a part of normal skin flora.

Eczema is a dry skin condition, which causes an itchy red rash. The itch can be intense, causing sufferers to scratch to relieve this. Parents describe the desperate measures babies can go to, including rubbing their cheeks raw on the sides of cots. However scratching causes bleeding and breaks the skin, increasing the inflammation and risk of infections.

There is a well-documented high health and socio-economic burden associated with eczema. Skin infections are one of the major causes of hospitalisation in NZ children, and a US study in 2012 found a 'striking association' between atopic dermatitis (eczema) and mental health disorders.

"Families with children with eczema need a lot of support," says Allergy New Zealand's CEO, Mark Dixon. "It is a day to day battle to keep the skin well-moisturised and under control - and really heartbreaking when the eczema flares up, which is often because of things we can't control."

Dr Diana Purvis, a paediatric dermatologist in Auckland and convenor of the Paediatric Society's Child and Youth Eczema Network, says the network was formed because it was recognised that eczema is a condition which needs to be taken seriously by health professionals. "It impacts significantly on quality of life such as constant disruption to sleep, and also increases the risk of skin infections and hospitalization." she says. "We see many referrals where there is serious psychosocial impact because of the child's eczema".

The Eczema Network has developed a series of YouTube clips to demonstrate the three key steps to managing eczema. These are available on the Allergy New Zealand website as well as the Starship and Paediatric Society's [website](#).

Allergy New Zealand says that while most children eventually outgrow eczema, the impact on their self-esteem can be long lasting. "It is important that schools particularly know how to help children and adolescents with eczema. The itch can be really distracting, and the skin condition itself stops them from being able to participate in school activities such as sport and so on. They might also miss a lot of school because of infections" says Mark Dixon. "This can affect their friendships and they can get quite withdrawn socially, as a result."

Dr Purvis agrees, and recommends if a child is frequently missing sleep or is missing school because of eczema then they should be referred to an eczema specialist nurse, dermatologist or paediatrician so that eczema treatment can be optimised.

About Allergy New Zealand

Allergy New Zealand has been a national charity in NZ for over 30 years, providing information, education and support to people with allergies, their caregivers, schools, health professionals and communities.

The Allergy Season Promotional Periods:

September : Hayfever/Allergic rhinitis

October : Eczema

November : Holidaying with allergies

Data Points:

- Over one-third of New Zealanders suffer from an allergy-related health issue – 1,500,000 people
- Allergy New Zealand receives no Government funding, and is totally reliant on the donations and grants of its supporters
- **Other themes for the Allergy Season in 2014:**
 - October : Eczema
 - November : Holidaying with allergies
- To learn more about allergies and how to help others go to www.allergy.org.nz .

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We are happy to put you in contact with Allergy New Zealand's CEO and others quoted in this media release. We are also happy to work with you to find a family in your area to interview, and/or provide further information.

Links

Allergy NZ website: www.allergy.org.nz

Allergy Season page: www.allergy.org.nz/allergyseason

Allergy NZ Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/allergy.nz>

References:

Martin et al, 'The prevalence and socio-economic predictors of infantile eczema'.

Blackwell Pub. 2013 Clayton et al, 'Time trends, ethnicity and risk factors for NZ children: ISAAC Phase 3'. Asia Pacific All, 2013.

BPJ, 'Managing skin infections in Maori and Pacific families'. Issue 45, 2013

Yaghmaie et al, 'Mental health comorbidity in patients with atopic dermatitis'. J All Clin Immun 2012

GUINZ (26% Dr-diagnosed by age 2 years); Martin et al (Melbourne) 2012; ISAAC