



Parent/Guardian Information Leaflet – Emollients – October 2020

Handwashing to prevent Covid-19

The official advice is clear: wash hands thoroughly and wash them often to reduce the risk of the viral spread of Covid-19 – hands, face, space. Soap is a detergent, it bonds with oils and allows them to be washed away, leaving the skin clean. Using handwash breaks down the structure that encloses viral particles, deactivating the virus. However, the reason hot water and soap are so effective against microbes is the same reason they're not great for the skin. Frequent hand washing breaks down the skin's barrier function and can result in dry, sore, cracked skin on the hands.

When the skin damage is due to direct damage to the skin caused by contact with soaps/detergents and repeated contact with water it is called **irritant contact dermatitis**.

If the irritant (soap and water) is removed, i.e. no longer used the skin on the hands will heal. However, as the Covid-19 guidance is for us all to have enhanced hand hygiene and wash our hands more frequently, this is not possible.

It is the removal of the skin's natural oils/barrier that causes the dry, sore, cracked skin and so replacing this barrier with a hand cream/moisturiser after washing and drying thoroughly can help.

Emollients (moisturisers)

Emollients are moisturising treatments applied directly to the skin to soothe and hydrate it. They cover the skin with a protective film to trap in moisture.

It should be noted that emollients are not classed as medicines, and as such, schools should not consider them as part of the 'Medicines in schools' policy. Emollients (moisturisers), when used for dry, irritated skin on hands due to enhanced hand hygiene measures do not need to be prescribed by a doctor/General Practice. Emollients are readily available, to purchase, in supermarkets and community pharmacies.

Emollient (moisturiser) products

There are many types of emollients – lotions, creams, sprays, gels, ointments and many different brands within each type of emollient.

For frequent day time use, creams are considered the most appropriate, as they are non-greasy and absorbed quickly. The table below shows some examples of suitable products that can be purchased from supermarkets/pharmacies.

Please note this list is not exhaustive, they are just suggestions for suitable products. Your local community pharmacy can provide advice regarding other suitable emollients for irritant contact dermatitis.

Table: Examples of suitable emollient products

The following products are examples of suitable products that be purchased from a supermarket:	The following products are examples of suitable products that be purchased from a community pharmacy:
E45® Daily hand cream – 50ml Aveeno® Daily Moisturising Hand Cream 75ml Oilatum® cream 150g Neutrogena® Norwegian Formula Dermatological Cream - 100 ml	Diprobase® 50g tube Epaderm® cream 50g and 150g Epimax® 100g Hydromol® 50g and 100g Oilatum® 150g Cetraben® 150g

There is no evidence to support the use of one emollient over another therefore selection is based on the known physiological properties of emollients, patient acceptability, dryness of the skin and areas of the skin involved.

Avoid 'cosmetic' style moisturisers because they contain scents and other ingredients that may cause further skin irritation.

Sometimes emollients can cause further irritation the skin and this is likely to be due to the excipients in the emollient, as some excipients are associated with skin sensitisation. The local community pharmacy will be able to advise regarding the excipients in emollient products so they can be avoided if necessary. It is recommended that parents/guardians have a trial use of the emollient with the child over the weekend, to check it is suitable, before sending the product to school with the child.

If a child requires an emollient we would advise that their parent/guardian buys them a small tube to bring to school, 50g - 150g size would be appropriate. Tubes of emollient are preferable to pots/tubs of emollient, as tubs/pots carry the risk of being contaminated and the risk of infection associated with the contamination. Tub/pots require the use of a spatula or clean spoon to take the product out of the tub/pot and hence are more appropriate for the home setting.

Using emollients

Emollients can be applied as often as required to keep the skin well moisturised and in good condition. Emollients are very safe and cannot be overused. Ideally, they should be applied after every handwash, as this is when the skin most needs moisture

but practically, if they are applied 3-4 times per day and as frequently as possible after handwashing, it will help to prevent dry, irritated skin.

Enough emollient should be applied so that the hands do not feel dry after application. The amount of emollient needed is relative to the size of the child's hands. The term used is 'fingertip units' which is the amount of cream that can be squeezed from a standard size tube nozzle (5mm diameter) from the first skin-crease of the child's index finger to the tip – see diagram. For both hands, it is recommended that 4-7 fingertip units are used for each application of emollient. Applying excessive emollient is not harmful but it may not be absorbed by the skin and cause 'greasy' hands.

Diagram of fingertip units (FTU):



For more information on how much emollient to use - <https://helloskin.co.uk/blogs/news/are-you-using-enough-emollient>

Handwashing and using emollients

- Wash thoroughly for at least 20 seconds
- Lather every surface of both hands
- Use an unscented hand wash or soap if possible
- Use warm - not too hot, not too cold – water
- Dry hands carefully but thoroughly afterwards - don't leave them to air dry!
- Pat dry with a paper towel, rather than rub with rough cotton
- Apply an unscented, oil-based emollient, as detailed above, within three minutes of drying your hands.
- Emollients should be applied directly to the skin.
- The emollient should be applied as soon as the skin is dry, after handwashing, to make sure it's properly absorbed.

Using emollients as soap substitutes

Sometimes it is recommended that emollients are used as a soap substitute, i.e. instead of handwash. Please note that to prevent the spread of Covid-19 it is recommended that if you have eczema or dry skin you should still wash your hands in line with government guidance, with soap and water, not an emollient as a soap substitute.

Flammable risk

Parents/guardians/children are advised to take care when using creams to treat dry skin conditions as they can easily dry onto clothing, bedding and bandages making them more flammable.

Some emollients, when dried on to fabric, can create a highly flammable combination that can cause serious injury and death. When applied to the skin emollient products are easily transferred from the skin on to clothing, bedding and bandages. When fabric with dried-on emollient encounters a naked flame, the resulting fire burns quickly and intensely and can result in serious injury or death. The risk increases with every application of the product as it transfers, dries, and builds up on the fabric. Some product remains even when the items are washed, so it is important to minimise the risk in additional ways, such as removing long-sleeved or loose clothing before cooking or using a safety lighter.

The products alone are not flammable, nor are they flammable when on the body.

The labelling and product information for emollient products should include a warning about the fire hazard, with clear advice not to smoke or go near naked flames.

For more information parents/guardians can visit the Gov.UK website: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/safe-use-of-emollient-skin-creams-to-treat-dry-skin-conditions>

Chronic/long-term skin conditions

This information/advice is only related to when an emollient/cream is needed for irritant contact dermatitis, related to frequent handwashing. This information does not refer to chronic long-term skin conditions, for example, atopic eczema, where the child will need to use large amounts of emollients and may be prescribed steroids to manage their condition. These conditions may require prescribed products and as such will be managed by the child's GP.

Severe hand dermatitis

If the child has severe hand dermatitis or suspect an infection (for example, the skin is oozing) OR it is not resolving with frequent use of emollients they may need further

advice from a healthcare professional - community pharmacists can provide further advice, including if the child needs to be seen by their GP.

Taking emollients into school

Emollients are not medicines, and as such, do not need to be prescribed. Please do not ask your family doctor to prescribe an emollient for use in school, please purchase an emollient from a supermarket or pharmacy, as detailed above.

Please ensure you provide your child with an emollient that is in a small tube, 50g-150g size.

Please label the tube with your child's name.

Your child will be asked to keep their emollient in their tray/drawer or similar at school. Older children will be able to keep their emollient in their school bag.

Where appropriate, children will be expected to apply their emollient to their own hands after handwashing. Children should be advised to use a 'sensible' amount of emollient. Too little and the emollient won't help to soothe dry, irritated skin and too much and the emollient won't sink into the skin readily and cause greasy hands. See above for advice on quantities.

Ask your child to practice applying emollient at home before sending an emollient to school with your child.

If the child needs help applying the emollient, for example very young children, a member of the school staff will be able to help your child to apply their emollient. Please discuss this with the school.

You will be asked to sign a consent form from school to consent to your child applying their emollient in school.

Your child will be expected to look after their emollient and use it sensibly in school. They should not share their emollient product with other children. The school will confiscate the emollient from the child if it is used inappropriately, for example, squirted at another child.