

Patient Information for Irritant contact dermatitis in Infant/Neonate/Child/Adult

Overview

Irritant contact dermatitis is an inflammatory rash caused by direct chemical injury to the skin. Unlike allergic contact dermatitis, which appears 48-72 hours after exposure to an allergen, the symptoms of irritant contact dermatitis can result within a few hours if the exposure is a strong irritant.

- Patients typically present complaining of a burning or stinging early in the course of irritant contact dermatitis.
- As the irritation becomes chronic and the skin becomes continually inflamed, itching can become a predominant symptom.

Who's At Risk

Irritant contact dermatitis can occur at any age.

- Patients with a history of eczema (atopic dermatitis) are particularly predisposed.
- Environmental factors include frequent hand washing and repeated exposure to water, solvents, fiberglass, mild acids, and alkalis.
- Dry air can predispose to irritant contact dermatitis.

Signs & Symptoms

The most common location for irritant contact dermatitis is the hands, though any body surface can be involved, including the genitals.

- Lesions can appear pink to red.
- In chronic cases, affected areas may develop scale and cracks.
- In acute cases, areas may have a sharp border corresponding to the areas of chemical exposure.
- On the fingertips, peeling of the skin, cracks, and scaling may be noted.

Self-Care Guidelines

- Remove the offending exposure and protect the skin from re-exposure.

- For irritated skin in body folds, consider a barrier cream with zinc oxide paste, such as Desitin.

When to Seek Medical Care

Seek medical evaluation for a rash that does not resolve with self-care measures.

Treatments Your Physician May Prescribe

- Your physician may recommend that you use petroleum jelly or a thick moisturizing cream applied directly to wet skin after bathing. Apply frequently (at least twice daily) to moisturize and protect the skin.
- Mild- to mid-potency topical steroids may be prescribed if inflammation is pronounced.