



Covid-19 hand hygiene precautions in schools

4th May 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

We are aware that several parents are worried about a potential allergic reaction to the soap used at Rackham and have shared concerns about this on social media, so we are writing to offer some clarity on the situation.

We have not altered the soap used in school and we believe the skin irritation that some pupils are experiencing is due to the necessary increased frequency of hand washing. In addition, it is important to note that the soap used at Rackham is in fact a premium brand. Having looked carefully at the product details this morning, it is very unlikely that this soap is causing an allergic reaction for our pupils but should you want to check the product details for yourself, the soap is named 'Dymapearl' and it is listed as a 'mild, unperfumed, antibacterial hand cleaner'.

I purchased some sensitive skin Carex soap at the weekend which has been distributed across the school this morning, but even when this soap is on offer, it costs in excess of £25 to purchase enough soap for just one day and this is not a viable option moving forward. We investigated the possibility of purchasing an alternative on our next order, but this option is not listed as being 'mild or unperfumed' unlike the premium soap that we currently purchase.

Unfortunately the impact of increased, regular hand washing can and often does impact the skin quite drastically. We are not in a position to be able to decrease the regularity of hand washing in school. The government have been very clear in their message that frequent and proper hand hygiene is one of the most important measures that can be used to prevent infection with the Covid-19 virus. Our risk assessment is in line with DfE guidance and Public Health England advice and is authorised by both the Local Authority and our Governors.

The National Eczema Society describes the condition as being a dry skin condition affecting 1 in 5 children in the UK. The main symptoms of hand eczema are dry, itchy and red skin affecting the whole hand, including the fingers. Other symptoms may include cracking, soreness and bleeding. In some cases, blisters may develop and fingers can become swollen.

If eczema is severe over a long time, the hands can become very painful, making it difficult to carry out day-to-day tasks such as doing up buttons, holding a pen or using a computer. Since the hands are a visible part of the body, children with hand eczema may also feel self-conscious.

Hand eczema can be triggered or worsened by factors that cause increased dryness of the skin, such as contact with hand sanitisers or harsh hand soaps. The skin of pre-pubescent children is especially vulnerable to these, as it is thinner than that of adults and generates less grease or sweat.

At Rackham, we are keen to support the medical needs of children with eczema and have done all we can to limit the impact of regular hand washing by:

- Allowing children to wash their hands instead of using hand sanitiser. The Covid-19 school re-opening guidance for all four UK nations says handwashing is a legitimate (or even preferred) alternative to using hand sanitiser.
- Allowing children to bring their own soap in to use at school. Our staff are used to having children in their class who require an alternative soap and will be happy to assist any family who would prefer their child to use a soap purchased at home and brought into school.
- Due to our bubble system in school, our pupils do not use different hand washing facilities across the school, rather they use the same one for the whole day. As such, when a child brings in their own soap, they are able to use that throughout the day.
- Providing paper towels and reminding all pupils to rinse well and dry well after hand washing. Despite significant additional costs to the school, we are continuing to provide paper towels for hand drying to ensure pupils are able to dry their hands well. Air dryers dry out the hands further and we have not yet reinstated these for this reason.
- Accepting and supporting children who need to apply emollient at regular intervals throughout the day to manage their eczema. This is particularly important given children are expected to wash their hands more frequently than normal, and with soap (they would ordinarily use their emollient to wash with rather than soap). Our staff are all more than happy to support your child to apply emollient throughout the day.
- Ensuring that no pupils are using hand sanitiser and hand washing simultaneously. Only in situations where hands need cleaning in a rush will hand sanitiser be offered and even then, children are given the option to wash their hands instead.

There is a lot of advice online about how to support your children if they are suffering with sore skin on their hands. It is certainly a problem which is not limited to Rackham alone. A lot of helpful parents from Rackham have advised that using plenty of emollient at bedtime helps replenish the moisture lost due to increased hand washing in the day. This is something we would certainly recommend if you notice your child has dry skin on their hands.

We will be talking to all children again this week about the correct way to wash hands, paying particular attention to the need to rinse and dry very well.

May I politely request that parents speak to the school directly if they have any concerns about products used in school in the future. We are best placed to answer your queries and can ensure you are provided with accurate information. Social media can be very helpful but it can also be unhelpful, particularly if misinformation is shared.

Thank you for your continued kindness and patience.

Kind regards,

Bridget Harrison

