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Stop the scratching Dry skin goes along with cold

BY SHANNON VANRAES, SUN MEDIA

Don't scratch that itch!

This time of year, most Winnipeggers are fighting dry skin along with cold temperatures, but for individuals with eczema the issue can be much worse.

"The problem we have here locally is low humidity," said **Dr. Earl Minuk, of Dr. Earl Minuk's Laser, Skin and Hair Centre.**

Environment Canada said the humidity level in Winnipeg dipped as low as 52% over the last few days, while wind chills have hovered in the --30s.

Minuk said yesterday that weather conditions can exacerbate issues associated with eczema and advised people experiencing skin inflammation to avoid irritants like wool or harsh chemicals to help curb symptoms.

"One of the things you need to do is lubricate your skin everyday with a bath or shower ... then lock the moisture in," **Minuk** said, adding he has seen some bad cases come through his door, especially ones involving children.

If left unattended, eczema can lead to a potentially serious secondary infection.

To help educate the public about a condition affecting two million Canadians, the Eczema Awareness Support and Education (EASE) program designated February as Eczema Awareness Month.

Dr. Ron Vendor, associate clinical professor at McMaster University, said the program's goal is to make information available to the public.

"It (eczema) can cause some psycho-social disturbances," he said, noting people may be left feeling self-conscious by the skin irritation.

Eczema can be treated using steroids like cortisone, but milder medications are also available.