

# Atopic eczema in under 12s

Quality standard

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This standard is based on CG57.

This standard should be read in conjunction with QS40, QS112, QS118 and QS119.

## Introduction

This quality standard covers the management of atopic eczema in children from birth up to the age of 12 years. For more information see the [scope](#).

### *Why this quality standard is needed*

Atopic eczema (atopic dermatitis) is a chronic, inflammatory, itchy skin condition that usually develops in early childhood. It is typically an episodic disease of exacerbation consisting of flares, which may occur 2 or 3 times per month, and remissions, but in some children it is continuous. Atopic eczema often has a genetic component that leads to the breakdown of the skin barrier. This makes the skin susceptible to trigger factors, including irritants and allergens, which can make the eczema worse.

In many children atopic eczema clears or improves during childhood, whereas in others it persists into adulthood. Some children who have atopic eczema will go on to develop asthma and/or allergic rhinitis; this sequence of events is sometimes referred to as the 'atopic march'. Although atopic eczema is not always recognised as a serious medical condition by healthcare professionals, it can have a significant negative impact on quality of life for children and their parents or carers.

### *How this quality standard supports delivery of outcome frameworks*

NICE quality standards are a concise set of prioritised statements designed to drive measureable quality improvements within a particular area of health or care. They are derived from high-quality guidance, such as that from NICE or other sources accredited by NICE. This quality standard, in conjunction with the guidance on which it is based, should contribute to the improvements outlined in the following outcomes framework published by the Department of Health:

- [NHS Outcomes Framework 2013/14](#) (Department of Health, November 2012)
- Improving outcomes and supporting transparency: a public health outcomes framework for England 2013–2016, [Part 1](#) and [Part 1A](#).

Tables 1 and 2 shows the outcomes, overarching indicators and improvement areas from the frameworks that the quality standard could contribute to achieving:

**Table 1 NHS Outcomes Framework 2013/14**

Domain	Overarching indicators and improvement areas
1 Preventing people from dying prematurely	<p><b>Overarching indicator</b></p> <p>1a Potential years of life lost (PYLL) from causes considered amenable to healthcare</p> <p>ii Children and young people</p> <p><b>Improvement areas</b></p> <p><i>Reducing deaths in babies and young children</i></p> <p>1.6 i Infant mortality*</p>
4 Ensuring that people have a positive experience of care	<p><b>Overarching indicator</b></p> <p>4a Patient experience of primary care</p> <p>i GP services</p> <p>ii GP Out of hours services</p> <p>4b Patient experience of hospital care</p> <p><b>Improvement areas</b></p> <p><i>Improving children and young people's experience of healthcare</i></p> <p>4.8 An indicator is under development</p>
<p><b>Alignment across the health and social care system</b></p> <p>* Indicator shared with Public Health Outcomes Framework.</p>	

**Table 2 Public health outcomes framework for England, 2013-2016**

Domain	Objectives and indicators
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4 Healthcare public health and preventing premature mortality	<p><b>Objective</b></p> <p>Reduced numbers of people living with preventable ill health and people dying prematurely, while reducing the gap between communities</p> <p><b>Indicators</b></p> <p>4.1 Infant mortality*</p>
<p><b>Alignment across the health and social care system</b></p> <p>* Indicator shared with NHS Outcomes Framework.</p>	

### *Coordinated services*

The quality standard for atopic eczema in children specifies that services should be commissioned from and coordinated across all relevant agencies encompassing the whole atopic eczema in children care pathway. A person-centred, integrated approach to providing services is fundamental to delivering high-quality care to children with atopic eczema.

The Health and Social Care Act 2012 sets out a clear expectation that the care system should consider NICE quality standards in planning and delivering services, as part of a general duty to secure continuous improvement in quality. Commissioners and providers of health and social care should refer to the library of NICE quality standards when designing high-quality services. Other quality standards that should also be considered when choosing, commissioning or providing a high-quality service for children with atopic eczema are listed in [Related quality standards](#).

### *Training and competencies*

The quality standard should be read in the context of national and local guidelines on training and competencies. All healthcare practitioners involved in assessing, caring for and treating atopic eczema in children should have sufficient and appropriate training and competencies to deliver the actions and interventions described in the quality standard.

## List of quality statements

Statement 1. Children with atopic eczema are offered, at diagnosis, an assessment that includes recording of their detailed clinical and treatment histories and identification of potential trigger factors.

Statement 2. Children with atopic eczema are offered treatment based on recorded eczema severity using the stepped-care plan, supported by education.

Statement 3. Children with atopic eczema have their (and their families') psychological wellbeing and quality of life discussed and recorded at each eczema consultation.

Statement 4. Children with atopic eczema are prescribed sufficient quantities (250–500 g weekly) from a choice of unperfumed emollients for daily use.

Statement 5. Children with uncontrolled or unresponsive atopic eczema, including recurring infections, or psychosocial problems related to the atopic eczema are referred for specialist dermatological advice.

Statement 6. Infants and young children with moderate or severe atopic eczema that has not been controlled by optimal treatment are referred for specialist investigation to identify possible food and other allergies.

Statement 7. Children with atopic eczema who have suspected eczema herpeticum receive immediate treatment with systemic aciclovir and are referred for same-day specialist dermatological advice.



## Quality statement 1: Assessment at diagnosis

### *Quality statement*

Children with atopic eczema are offered, at diagnosis, an assessment that includes recording of their detailed clinical and treatment histories and identification of potential trigger factors.

### *Rationale*

Recording a child's detailed clinical and treatment history as part of the assessment in all healthcare settings is an important step in the management of atopic eczema in children. At the diagnosis stage, assessing potential trigger factors, including irritants and allergens, will lead to better management and potentially lead to a reduction in the severity of the atopic eczema experienced by the child.

### *Quality measures*

#### Structure

Evidence of local arrangements to ensure that children with atopic eczema are offered, at diagnosis, an assessment that includes recording of their detailed clinical and treatment histories and identification of potential trigger factors.

**Data source:** Local data collection.

#### Process

The proportion of children with atopic eczema who receive, at diagnosis, an assessment that includes recording of their detailed clinical and treatment histories and identification of potential trigger factors.

Numerator – the number of children in the denominator who receive, at diagnosis, an assessment that includes recording of their detailed clinical and treatment histories and identification of potential trigger factors.

Denominator – the number of children with newly diagnosed atopic eczema.

**Data source:** Local data collection.

## *What the quality statement means for service providers, healthcare practitioners and commissioners*

**Service providers** ensure that systems are in place to offer children with atopic eczema, at diagnosis, an assessment that includes recording of their detailed clinical and treatment histories and identification of potential trigger factors.

**Healthcare practitioners** offer children with atopic eczema, at diagnosis, an assessment that includes recording of their detailed clinical and treatment histories and identification of potential trigger factors.

**Commissioners** ensure that they commission services with local arrangements to offer children with atopic eczema, at diagnosis, an assessment that includes recording of their detailed clinical and treatment histories and identification of potential trigger factors.

## *What the quality statement means for patients and carers*

Children with newly diagnosed atopic eczema are offered an assessment, in which their healthcare professional records their detailed medical and treatment histories and identifies any factors that might trigger their eczema.

## *Source guidance*

- Atopic eczema in children (NICE clinical guideline 57), recommendations [1.1.1.1](#) and [1.4.1.1](#) (key priority for implementation).

## *Definitions of terms used in this quality statement*

### **Clinical and treatment histories**

[NICE clinical guideline 57](#) recommends that healthcare practitioners take detailed clinical and treatment histories at diagnosis to aid management of atopic eczema in children, and that these should include questions about:

- time of onset, pattern and severity of the atopic eczema
- response to previous and current treatments
- possible trigger factors (irritant and allergic)

- the impact of the atopic eczema on children and their parents or carers and families
- dietary history including any dietary manipulation
- growth and development
- personal and family history of atopic diseases.

### Potential trigger factors

NICE clinical guideline 57 recommends that when clinically assessing children with atopic eczema, healthcare practitioners should seek to identify potential trigger factors including irritants, for example soaps and detergents, skin infections and contact, food and inhalant allergens. In addition, the expert opinion of the Topic Expert Group stated that psychological stress can cause flares of atopic eczema, and should be avoided where possible.

## Quality statement 2: Stepped approach to management

### *Quality statement*

Children with atopic eczema are offered treatment based on recorded eczema severity using the stepped-care plan, supported by education.

### *Rationale*

Atopic eczema is typically an episodic condition consisting of flares and remissions, though in some children it is continuous. Treatment for atopic eczema should be tailored, with treatments stepped up and down according to the recorded severity of symptoms. Areas of atopic eczema of differing severity can coexist in the same child, and each area should be treated independently. The stepped-care plan involves self-management and adherence to treatment, therefore healthcare practitioners should give children with atopic eczema and their families or carers support and information on when and how to step treatment up or down.

### *Quality measures*

#### **Structure**

Evidence of local arrangements to ensure that children with atopic eczema are offered treatment based on recorded eczema severity using the stepped-care plan, supported by education.

**Data source:** Local data collection.

#### **Process**

a) The proportion of children with atopic eczema who have their eczema severity recorded at each eczema consultation.

Numerator – the number of children in the denominator who have their eczema severity recorded at each eczema consultation.

Denominator – the number of eczema consultations with children with atopic eczema.

**Data source:** Local data collection.

b) The proportion of children with atopic eczema who receive treatment based on recorded eczema severity using the stepped-care plan, supported by education.

Numerator – the number of children in the denominator who receive treatment based on recorded eczema severity using the stepped-care plan, supported by education.

Denominator – the number of children with atopic eczema.

*Data source:* Local data collection.

### *What the quality statement means for service providers, healthcare practitioners and commissioners*

**Service providers** ensure that systems are in place to offer children with atopic eczema treatment based on recorded eczema severity using the stepped-care plan, supported by education.

**Healthcare practitioners** offer children with atopic eczema treatment based on recorded eczema severity using the stepped-care plan, supported by education.

**Commissioners** ensure that they commission services with local arrangements to offer children with atopic eczema treatment based on recorded eczema severity using the stepped-care plan, supported by education.

### *What the quality statement means for patients and carers*

**Children with atopic eczema** are offered treatment using a stepped-care plan (which means that treatments are added or stopped depending on how severe the eczema is) and given advice and information about atopic eczema and its treatment.

### *Source guidance*

- Atopic eczema in children (NICE clinical guideline 57), recommendations [1.2.1.1](#) (key priority for implementation) and [1.2.1.3](#) and [1.5.1.1](#) (key priority for implementation).

## Definitions of terms used in this quality statement

### Eczema severity

[NICE clinical guideline 57](#) recommends an assessment of the physical severity of atopic eczema and the impact of atopic eczema on quality of life and social wellbeing at each eczema consultation. The guideline defines the physical severity of atopic eczema as follows:

- Clear: normal skin, no evidence of active atopic eczema
- Mild: areas of dry skin, infrequent itching (with or without small areas of redness)
- Moderate: areas of dry skin, frequent itching, redness (with or without excoriation and localised skin thickening)
- Severe: widespread areas of dry skin, incessant itching, redness (with or without excoriation, extensive skin thickening, bleeding, oozing, cracking and alteration of pigmentation).

### Stepped approach to management

[NICE clinical guideline 57](#) recommends that healthcare practitioners use a stepped approach to managing atopic eczema in children, which means tailoring the treatment step to the severity of the atopic eczema. Emollients should form the basis of atopic eczema management and should always be used, even when the atopic eczema is clear. Management can then be stepped up or down, according to the severity of symptoms, by adding or withdrawing treatments as follows (phototherapy and systemic therapy should be undertaken only under specialist dermatological supervision by staff who are experienced in dealing with children):

Mild atopic eczema	Moderate atopic eczema	Severe atopic eczema
Emollients	Emollients	Emollients
Mild-potency topical corticosteroids	Moderate-potency topical corticosteroids	Potent topical corticosteroids
	Topical calcineurin inhibitors	Topical calcineurin inhibitors
	Bandages	Bandages
		Phototherapy
		Systemic therapy

Healthcare practitioners should review repeat prescriptions of individual products and combinations of products with children with atopic eczema (and their parents or carers) at least once a year to ensure that treatment remains optimal.

## Supported by education

Education on the use of, and adherence to, treatment is essential to the stepped-care plan approach. [NICE clinical guideline 57](#) recommends that healthcare practitioners offer children with atopic eczema (and their parents or carers) information on how to recognise the symptoms and signs of bacterial infection and also how to recognise and manage flares of atopic eczema according to the stepped-care plan. Healthcare practitioners should spend time educating children with atopic eczema (and their parents or carers) about atopic eczema and its treatment. They should provide information in verbal and written forms, with practical demonstrations, and should cover:

- how much of the treatments to use
- how to apply and how often to apply prescribed treatments, including emollients, steroids, calcineurin inhibitors and medicated dressings (bandages)
- when and how to step treatment up or down
- how to treat infected atopic eczema.

This should be reinforced at every consultation, addressing factors that affect adherence.

## *Equality and diversity considerations*

Healthcare practitioners should be aware of the potential difficulties of assessing eczema severity in children with darker skin tones.

In recommending skin treatments, healthcare practitioners should be sensitive to the cultural practices of families or carers of children with atopic eczema. For example, if families or carers use olive oil as a skin treatment (which is likely to be harmful to a child's skin) or if they rinse children after bathing (rinsing off emollients), the reasons for using the recommended treatment and applying it correctly should be explained sensitively.

## Quality statement 3: Psychological wellbeing and quality of life

### *Quality statement*

Children with atopic eczema have their (and their families') psychological wellbeing and quality of life discussed and recorded at each eczema consultation.

### *Rationale*

Healthcare practitioners should adopt a holistic approach when assessing a child's atopic eczema at each eczema consultation, taking into account the severity of the atopic eczema and the impact on the child's quality of life. Atopic eczema can have a negative psychological effect on children and their families or carers. Discussing and recording the impact of the atopic eczema (even if its physical severity is mild) on psychological and psychosocial wellbeing and quality of life is an essential part of a holistic approach, and can inform treatment strategies.

### *Quality measures*

#### **Structure**

Evidence of local arrangements to ensure that children with atopic eczema have their (and their families') psychological wellbeing and quality of life discussed and recorded at each eczema consultation.

**Data source:** Local data collection.

#### **Process**

The proportion of eczema consultations with children with atopic eczema at which their (and their families') psychological wellbeing and quality of life is discussed and recorded.

Numerator – the number of consultations in the denominator at which children's (and their families') psychological wellbeing and quality of life is discussed and recorded.

Denominator – the number of eczema consultations with children with atopic eczema.

**Data source:** Local data collection.



## *What the quality statement means for service providers, healthcare practitioners and commissioners*

**Service providers** ensure that local arrangements are in place for children with atopic eczema and their families to be asked about their psychological wellbeing and quality of life, and for this to be recorded at each eczema consultation.

**Healthcare practitioners** ensure that children with atopic eczema and their families are asked their psychological wellbeing and quality of life, and that this is recorded at each eczema consultation.

**Commissioners** ensure that they commission services with local arrangements for children with atopic eczema and their families to be asked about their psychological wellbeing and quality of life, and for this to be recorded at each eczema consultation.

## *What the quality statement means for patients and carers*

**Children with atopic eczema and their families or carers** are asked about how they are feeling and how the eczema is affecting their lives on a day-to-day basis, and have this recorded at each eczema consultation.

## *Source guidance*

- Atopic eczema in children (NICE clinical guideline 57), recommendations [1.2.1.1 \(key priority for implementation\)](#), [1.2.1.4](#) and [1.2.1.5](#).

## *Definitions of terms used in this quality statement*

### **Psychological wellbeing and quality of life**

[NICE clinical guideline 57](#) recommends that healthcare practitioners should adopt a holistic approach when assessing a child's atopic eczema at each consultation. Healthcare practitioners should take account of the child's quality of life, including everyday activities and sleep, and psychosocial wellbeing, as well as the physical severity of their condition. There is not necessarily a direct relationship between the severity of atopic eczema and its impact on quality of life. Even mild atopic eczema can have a negative impact on psychological and psychosocial wellbeing and quality of life.

The guideline defines the impact of atopic eczema on quality of life and psychosocial wellbeing as follows:

- None: no impact on quality of life
- Mild: little impact on everyday activities, sleep and psychosocial wellbeing
- Moderate: moderate impact on everyday activities and psychosocial wellbeing, frequently disturbed sleep
- Severe: severe limitation of everyday activities and psychosocial functioning, nightly loss of sleep.

The guideline recommends that healthcare practitioners take into account the impact of atopic eczema on parents or carers as well as the child.

In the opinion of the Topic Expert Group, the impact of atopic eczema on families or carers should be recorded in the notes of the child who has atopic eczema.

## Quality statement 4: Provision of emollients

### *Quality statement*

Children with atopic eczema are prescribed sufficient quantities (250–500 g weekly) from a choice of unperfumed emollients for daily use.

### *Rationale*

Emollients should form the basis of atopic eczema management and should always be used, even when the atopic eczema is clear. Children with atopic eczema should have sufficient quantities of emollients for everyday use. These should be suited to the child's needs and preferences, with alternatives offered if a particular emollient causes irritation or is not acceptable to a child.

### *Quality measures*

#### **Structure**

Evidence of local arrangements to prescribe children with atopic eczema sufficient quantities (250–500 g weekly) from a choice of unperfumed emollients for daily use.

*Data source:* Local data collection.

#### **Process**

The proportion of children with atopic eczema who are prescribed sufficient quantities (250–500 g weekly) of unperfumed emollients for daily use.

Numerator – the number of children in the denominator who are prescribed sufficient quantities (250–500 g weekly) of unperfumed emollients for daily use.

Denominator – the number of children with atopic eczema.

*Data source:* Local data collection.

## *What the quality statement means for service providers, healthcare practitioners and commissioners*

**Service providers** ensure that local arrangements are in place to prescribe children with atopic eczema sufficient quantities (250–500 g weekly) from a choice of unperfumed emollients for daily use.

**Healthcare practitioners** prescribe children with atopic eczema sufficient quantities (250–500 g weekly) from a choice of unperfumed emollients for daily use.

**Commissioners** ensure that they commission services with local arrangements for children with atopic eczema to be prescribed sufficient quantities (250–500 g weekly) from a choice of unperfumed emollients for daily use.

## *What the quality statement means for patients and carers*

**Children with atopic eczema** receive a prescription for enough (between 250 g and 500 g weekly) unperfumed emollient (a special type of skin moisturiser) chosen to best suit their needs and preferences for daily use.

## *Source guidance*

- Atopic eczema in children (NICE clinical guideline 57), recommendations [1.5.1.1](#), [1.5.2.1](#) ([key priorities for implementation](#)) and [1.5.2.2](#).

## *Definitions of terms used in this quality statement*

### **Unperfumed emollients**

[NICE clinical guideline 57](#) recommends that a choice of unperfumed emollients should be offered to children with atopic eczema that is suited to the child's needs and preferences for everyday moisturising, washing and bathing. This may include a combination of products or 1 product for all purposes.

The guideline adds that healthcare practitioners should offer an alternative emollient if a particular emollient causes irritation or is not acceptable to a child with atopic eczema.

Leave-on emollients should not be of a type that can cause harm to a child's skin. The [full NICE guideline](#) states that aqueous cream is associated with stinging when used as a leave-on emollient

but it can be used as a wash product. Since the publication of the guideline there has been increasing concern about the use of sodium lauryl sulfate as an emulsifier (a substance used to mix oil with water to make creams) and an [MHRA drug safety update in March 2013](#) advises that if a patient reports or shows signs of skin irritation with the use of aqueous cream, treatment should be discontinued and an alternative emollient that does not contain sodium lauryl sulfate should be tried.

### *Equality and diversity considerations*

In recommending skin treatments, healthcare practitioners should be sensitive to the cultural practices of families or carers of children with atopic eczema. For example, if families or carers use olive oil as a skin treatment (which is likely to be harmful to a child's skin) or if they rinse children after bathing (rinsing off emollients), the reasons for using the recommended treatment and applying it correctly should be explained sensitively.

## Quality statement 5: Referral for specialist dermatological advice

### *Quality statement*

Children with uncontrolled or unresponsive atopic eczema, including recurring infections, or psychosocial problems related to the atopic eczema are referred for specialist dermatological advice.

### *Rationale*

Specialist dermatological advice may be beneficial for children with atopic eczema to improve the management of their condition. It can help to identify underlying reasons why the atopic eczema is not well controlled (including trigger factors such as contact allergens) or provide support if the condition has a negative impact on quality of life and psychosocial wellbeing. Parents' or carers' assessments of a child's physical or psychosocial wellbeing should be regarded as important determinants of the need for specialist dermatological advice.

### *Quality measures*

#### **Structure**

Evidence of local arrangements for children with uncontrolled or unresponsive atopic eczema, including recurring infections, or psychosocial problems related to the atopic eczema to be referred for specialist dermatological advice.

**Data source:** Local data collection.

#### **Process**

The proportion of children with uncontrolled or unresponsive atopic eczema, including recurring infections, or psychosocial problems related to the atopic eczema who are referred for specialist dermatological advice.

**Numerator** – the number of children in the denominator who are referred for specialist dermatological advice.

**Denominator** – the number of children with uncontrolled or unresponsive atopic eczema, including recurring infections, or psychosocial problems related to the atopic eczema.

**Data source:** Local data collection.

### *What the quality statement means for service providers, healthcare practitioners and commissioners*

**Service providers** ensure that there are local arrangements for children with uncontrolled or unresponsive atopic eczema, including recurring infections, or psychosocial problems related to the atopic eczema to be referred for specialist dermatological advice.

**Healthcare practitioners** ensure that children with uncontrolled or unresponsive atopic eczema, including recurring infections, or psychosocial problems related to the atopic eczema are referred for specialist dermatological advice.

**Commissioners** ensure that they commission services with local arrangements to refer children with uncontrolled or unresponsive atopic eczema, including recurring infections, or psychosocial problems related to the atopic eczema for specialist dermatological advice.

### *What the quality statement means for patients and carers*

**Children with atopic eczema** whose eczema does not improve after treatment, becomes infected repeatedly or causes them social or psychological problems are referred to a specialist.

### *Source guidance*

- Atopic eczema in children (NICE clinical guideline 57) recommendations [1.7.1.3 \(key priority for implementation\)](#), [1.7.1.2](#) and [1.4.1.5](#)

### *Definitions of terms used in this quality statement*

#### **Specialist dermatological advice**

The referral should be to a specialist dermatological unit dealing with paediatric patients, for example a clinician with experience or qualifications in paediatric dermatology. This could include a paediatrician, specialist nurse or a GP with a specialist interest as long as they are within a dermatological unit and trained in paediatric dermatology.

[NICE clinical guideline 57](#) recommends referral for specialist dermatological advice if the atopic eczema is not well controlled (including as assessed by the child, parent or carer), has not responded to treatment, is associated with recurring infections or if contact allergic dermatitis is

suspected. Specialist dermatological advice should also be sought if the physical condition is giving rise to significant social or psychological problems for the child (or their parents or carers), including sleep disturbance or poor school attendance.

Onward referral for psychological advice can be made if necessary. [NICE clinical guideline 57](#) recommends that children with atopic eczema that has responded to optimum management but for whom the impact of the atopic eczema on quality of life and psychosocial wellbeing has not improved should be referred for psychological advice.

### *Equality and diversity considerations*

Healthcare practitioners should be aware of the potential difficulties of assessing eczema severity in children with darker skin tones.

Parent or carer assessment should be considered a good indicator of need for referral for all children. This must apply equally to all children regardless of socioeconomic status, and should not depend on the parents' or carers' ability to articulate a need for specialist care.



## Quality statement 6: Specialist allergy investigation

### *Quality statement*

Infants and young children with moderate or severe atopic eczema that has not been controlled by optimal treatment are referred for specialist investigation to identify possible food and other allergies.

### *Rationale*

Infants and young children with moderate or severe atopic eczema have an increased likelihood of food and other allergies. Food allergies can cause a range of symptoms, including anaphylaxis, and can trigger or exacerbate atopic eczema. The most common food allergies for infants and young children with atopic eczema are to cows' milk, hens' eggs and nuts.

Specialist investigation can provide accurate identification of common food and other allergies; advice on dietary avoidance of allergens and choice of infant formula; and improved condition management strategies.

### *Quality measures*

#### **Structure**

Evidence of local arrangements for infants and young children with moderate or severe atopic eczema that has not been controlled by optimal treatment to be referred for specialist investigation to identify possible food and other allergies.

**Data source:** Local data collection.

#### **Process**

The proportion of infants and young children with moderate or severe atopic eczema that has not been controlled by optimal treatment who are referred for specialist investigation to identify possible food and other allergies.

Numerator – the number of infants and young children in the denominator who are referred for specialist investigation to identify possible food and other allergies.

Denominator – the number of infants and young children with moderate or severe atopic eczema that has not been controlled by optimal treatment.

*Data source:* Local data collection.

### *What the quality statement means for service providers, healthcare practitioners and commissioners*

**Service providers** ensure that there are local arrangements for infants and young children with moderate or severe atopic eczema that has not been controlled by optimal treatment to be referred for specialist investigation to identify possible food and other allergies.

**Healthcare practitioners** ensure that infants and young children with moderate or severe atopic eczema that has not been controlled by optimal treatment are referred for specialist investigation to identify possible food and other allergies.

**Commissioners** ensure that they commission services with local arrangements to offer infants and young children with moderate or severe atopic eczema that has not been controlled by optimal treatment referral for specialist investigation to identify possible food and other allergies.

### *What the quality statement means for patients and carers*

**Infants and young children (under 5 years)** with moderate or severe atopic eczema that has not improved after treatment are referred to a specialist to find out whether they have any allergies that may be causing their eczema.

### *Source guidance*

- Atopic eczema in children (NICE clinical guideline 57) recommendations [1.4.1.2 \(key priority for implementation\)](#), [1.7.1.3 key priority for implementation](#), [1.7.1.5](#), [1.4.1.5](#), [1.4.1.7](#) and [1.4.1.8](#).

### *Definitions of terms used in this quality statement*

#### **Infants and young children**

[NICE clinical guideline 57](#) refers to a possible diagnosis of food allergy in infants and young children. The consensus of the quality standard Topic Expert Group is that this refers to children aged under 5 years.

## Moderate or severe atopic eczema

NICE clinical guideline 57 defines moderate and severe atopic eczema as follows:

- Moderate: areas of dry skin, frequent itching, redness (with or without excoriation and localised skin thickening)
- Severe: widespread areas of dry skin, incessant itching, redness (with or without excoriation, extensive skin thickening, bleeding, oozing, cracking and alteration of pigmentation).

## Optimal treatment

Optimal treatment for atopic eczema for infants and young children refers to the stepped-care plan.

## Specialist investigation

Referral for investigation into suspected food allergies may be to either a paediatric allergist or paediatric dermatologist, depending on the local availability of services. Other associated allergies (such as those to pollens or house dust mite) can also be investigated at the same time. Access to specialist allergy nurses and dieticians would normally be through the allergy team rather than a direct referral by a GP.

## Quality statement 7: Treatment of eczema herpeticum

### *Quality statement*

Children with atopic eczema who have suspected eczema herpeticum receive immediate treatment with systemic aciclovir and are referred for same-day specialist dermatological advice.

### *Rationale*

Eczema herpeticum (widespread herpes simplex virus) is a serious under-recognised condition and, if not diagnosed promptly, the child's condition may deteriorate rapidly. Eczema herpeticum can be fatal or can lead to blindness if not treated, and should therefore be an indication for urgent referral.

### *Quality measures*

#### **Structure**

Evidence of local arrangements to ensure that children with atopic eczema who have suspected eczema herpeticum receive immediate treatment with systemic aciclovir and are referred for same-day specialist dermatological advice.

**Data source:** Local data collection.

#### **Process**

The proportion of children with atopic eczema who have suspected eczema herpeticum who receive immediate treatment with systemic aciclovir and are referred for same-day specialist dermatological advice.

Numerator – the number of children in the denominator who receive immediate treatment with systemic aciclovir and are referred for same-day specialist dermatological advice.

Denominator – the number of children with atopic eczema who have suspected eczema herpeticum.

**Data source:** Local data collection.

## *What the quality statement means for service providers, healthcare practitioners and commissioners*

**Service providers** ensure that local arrangements are in place for children with atopic eczema who have suspected eczema herpeticum to receive immediate treatment with systemic aciclovir and to be referred for same-day specialist dermatological advice.

**Healthcare practitioners** ensure that children with atopic eczema who have suspected eczema herpeticum receive immediate treatment with systemic aciclovir and are referred for same-day specialist dermatological advice.

**Commissioners** ensure that they commission services with local arrangements to give children with atopic eczema who have suspected eczema herpeticum immediate treatment with systemic aciclovir and to refer them for same-day specialist dermatological advice.

## *What the quality statement means for patients and carers*

**Children with atopic eczema** who have suspected eczema herpeticum (a rare but serious infection caused by the same virus that causes cold sores) receive immediate treatment with an antiviral drug (called systemic aciclovir), which can be given as medicine or an injection, and are referred immediately for same-day specialist advice.

## *Source guidance*

- Atopic eczema in children (NICE clinical guideline 57) recommendations [1.5.7.10](#), [1.5.7.11](#), [1.5.7.12](#) (key priority for implementation) and [1.7.1.1](#)

## *Definitions of terms used in this quality statement*

### **Suspected eczema herpeticum**

Eczema herpeticum is a widespread herpes simplex virus. Signs of eczema herpeticum are:

- areas of rapidly worsening, painful eczema
- clustered blisters consistent with early-stage cold sores
- punched-out erosions (circular, depressed, ulcerated lesions) usually 1–3 mm that are uniform in appearance (these may coalesce to form larger areas of erosion with crusting)

- possible fever, lethargy or distress.

## Specialist dermatological advice

The referral should be to a specialist dermatological unit dealing with paediatric patients, for example, a clinician with experience and qualifications in paediatric dermatology. This could include a specialist nurse or a GP with a specialist interest if they are working within a dermatological unit and trained in paediatric dermatology. If eczema herpeticum involves the skin around the eyes, the child should be referred for same-day ophthalmological and dermatological advice.

## Systemic aciclovir

Oral or intravenous aciclovir can be given depending on the clinical situation. Aciclovir is likely to be given orally in primary care and intravenously in secondary care. The [full NICE guideline](#) recommends that if a child with atopic eczema has a lesion on the skin suspected to be herpes simplex virus, treatment with oral aciclovir should be started even if the infection is localised.

## Using the quality standard

### *Quality measures*

The quality measures accompanying the quality statements aim to improve the structure, process and outcomes of care in areas identified as needing quality improvement. They are not a new set of targets or mandatory indicators for performance management.

We have indicated if current national indicators exist that could be used to measure the quality statements. These include indicators developed by the Health and Social Care Information Centre through its [Indicators for Quality Improvement Programme](#). If there is no national indicator that could be used to measure a quality statement, the quality measure should form the basis for audit criteria developed and used locally.

See NICE's [What makes up a NICE quality standard?](#) for further information, including advice on using quality measures.

### *Levels of achievement*

Expected levels of achievement for quality measures are not specified. Quality standards are intended to drive up the quality of care, and so achievement levels of 100% should be aspired to (or 0% if the quality statement states that something should not be done). However, NICE recognises that this may not always be appropriate in practice, taking account of safety, choice and professional judgement, and therefore desired levels of achievement should be defined locally.

### *Using other national guidance and policy documents*

It is important that the quality standard is considered by commissioners, providers, healthcare practitioners, patients and carers alongside the documents listed in [Development sources](#).

### *Information for commissioners*

NICE has produced [support for commissioning](#) that considers the commissioning implications and potential resource impact of this quality standard. This is available on the NICE website.

## *Information for the public*

NICE has produced [information for the public](#) about this quality standard. Patients and carers can use it to find out about the quality of care they should expect to receive; as a basis for asking questions about their care, and to help make choices between providers of social care services.



## Diversity, equality and language

During the development of this quality standard, equality issues have been considered and [equality assessments](#) are available.

Good communication between healthcare practitioners and children with atopic eczema, and/or their parents or carers, is essential. Treatment, care and support, and the information given about it, should be both age-appropriate and culturally appropriate. It should also be accessible to people with additional needs such as physical, sensory or learning disabilities, and to people who do not speak or read English. Children with atopic eczema, and/or their parents or carers, should have access to an interpreter or advocate if needed.

Commissioners and providers should aim to achieve the quality standard in their local context, in light of their duties to avoid unlawful discrimination and to have regard to promoting equality of opportunity. Nothing in this quality standard should be interpreted in a way that would be inconsistent with compliance with those duties.

## Development sources

Further explanation of the methodology used can be found in the quality standards [process guide](#) on the NICE website.

## *Evidence sources*

The document below contains recommendations from NICE guidance that was used by the quality standard Topic Expert Group to develop the quality standard statements and measures.

- [Atopic eczema in children: management of atopic eczema in children from birth up to the age of 12 years](#). NICE clinical guideline 57 (2007).

## Related NICE quality standards

### *Published*

- [Psoriasis](#). NICE quality standard 40 (2013).
- [Patient experience in adult NHS services](#). NICE quality standard 15 (2012).

## Topic Expert Group and NICE project team

### *Topic Expert Group*

**Dr Sue Lewis-Jones (chair)**

Honorary Consultant Dermatologist and Clinical lecturer, NHS and University of Dundee

**Mrs Carole Bell**

Head of Children's Commissioning, North West London Commissioning Support Unit, London

**Dr Christine Clark**

Independent Pharmacy Consultant

**Mrs Sue Clarke**

Health Visitor and Lecturer in Allergy and Paediatric Respiratory, West Essex Primary Care Trust and Education for Health

**Dr Helen Cox**

Consultant Paediatric Allergist, Imperial College, London

**Professor Michael Cork**

Professor of Dermatology and Head of Academic Unit of Dermatology Research at University of Sheffield, Honorary Consultant Dermatologist to Sheffield Children's Hospital NHS Trust and Honorary Consultant Dermatologist to Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust

**Dr Elizabeth Gilmour**

Consultant Dermatologist, Tameside Hospital Foundation Trust

**Mrs Sandra Lawton**

Nurse Consultant Dermatology, Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust

**Dr Jane Ravenscroft**

Consultant Dermatologist, Nottingham University Hospitals

**Dr Matthew Ridd**

GP and NIHR Clinical Lecturer, University of Bristol

**Mrs Amanda Roberts**

Lay member

**Ms Jean Robinson**

Clinical Nurse Specialist/ Paediatric Dermatology, Barts Health NHS Trust

**Mrs Jacqueline Torley**

Lay member

***NICE project team***

**Dr Dylan Jones**

Associate Director

**Ms Rachel Neary**

Programme Manager

**Ms Sabina Khan**

Lead Technical Analyst

**Mr Tony Smith**

Lead Technical Adviser

**Ms Esther Clifford**

Project Manager

**Ms Lisa Nicholls**

Coordinator

## About this quality standard

NICE quality standards describe high-priority areas for quality improvement in a defined care or service area. Each standard consists of a prioritised set of specific, concise and measurable statements. NICE quality standards draw on existing NICE or NICE-accredited guidance that provides an underpinning, comprehensive set of recommendations, and are designed to support the measurement of improvement.

The methods and processes for developing NICE quality standards are described in the [quality standards process guide](#).

This quality standard has been incorporated into the [NICE pathway on atopic eczema in children](#).

### Changes after publication

April 2015: minor maintenance

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### *Endorsing organisation*

This quality standard has been endorsed by NHS England, as required by the Health and Social Care Act (2012)

### *Supporting organisations*

Many organisations share NICE's commitment to quality improvement using evidence-based guidance. The following supporting organisations have recognised the benefit of the quality standard in improving care for patients, carers, service users and members of the public. They have agreed to work with NICE to ensure that those commissioning or providing services are made aware of and encouraged to use the quality standard.

- Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health
- British Association of Dermatologists
- British Society for Paediatric Dermatology
- Royal College of General Practitioners
- Royal College of Nursing