

Information sheet for Maternal and Child Health Nurses: Preservative in baby wipes causing dermatitis

What is MI?

Methylisothiazolinone (MI) is a preservative used in baby wipes and other personal products, which is currently causing an appreciable number of cases of allergic contact dermatitis, an itchy skin rash. Preservatives like MI are needed in moist wipes to prevent bacterial contamination.

Where is MI found?

MI may be found in a range of cosmetic and personal products including:

- Disposable wet wipes including baby wipes and make-up removal wipes
- Shampoos
- Body washes and hand cleaners
- Moisturisers
- Sunscreens
- Deodorants

Who is affected?

Interestingly it is the parents and carers using baby wipes on their children who are developing hand dermatitis, caused by allergic contact dermatitis to MI. However it is likely that allergic contact dermatitis involving the nappy area in children and babies may not be diagnosed accurately, and considered just to be nappy rash.

Maternal and Child Health Nurses and medical practitioners, as well as parents of babies and young children, should be aware of the potential for allergic contact dermatitis to develop to MI from baby wipes.

What are the symptoms?

- An itchy red rash on the hands and fingers (similar appearance to eczema).
- Babies or young children may present with 'nappy rash' that is persistent and resistant to treatment (However there are many factors which contribute to nappy rash for example, contact with urine, faeces, sweating and thrush).

How is allergic contact dermatitis to MI diagnosed?

Patch testing involving the back over several days (not prick testing) is used to diagnose allergy to MI.

How to prevent allergy to MI?

All users of baby wipes should check packaging to ensure that the product does not contain MI. **NOT ALL WIPES CONTAIN MI.** Other products used should also be checked for this preservative as well.

People with unexplained rashes should check the label of ingredients and see if it contains MI. Alternative products should be used if necessary.

Where to get help?

If products containing MI are avoided and yet the rash persists, treatment should be sought from GPs and/or dermatologists.

Advice from the Skin and Cancer Foundation Victoria can also be sought. Phone Amanda, 03 9623 9402 or email apalmer@occdern.asn.au

Letter to the Editor "Methylisothiazolinone in baby wipes: a rising star among causes of contact dermatitis" is available in the Medical Journal of Australia 2014; 200 (4): 208.