

Beat the Bugs: A Handbook for Community Care Workers in the Pilbara: an update

2025



About this handbook

- This Keeping Skin Healthy handbook is for community care workers to support communities in Newman and the Western Desert, Pilbara.
- This handbook has been updated in 2025 to reflect changes in the National Healthy Skin Guidelines (2nd Edition) which was launched in 2023.
- Several of the pictures and illustrations are from the Menzies School of Health Research and Lowitja Institute East Arnhem Regional Healthy Skin Project.
- Cover page artwork is from Martumili Ngurra 2009, by Kumpaya Girgaba, Jakayu Biljabu, Ngamaru Bidu, Thelma Judson, Ngalangka Nola Taylor and Jane Girgaba.

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Walker, Roz; Wyndow, Paula; Anshelevich, Ellen; Zheng, Andy; Mullane, Marianne; Amgarth-Duff, Ingrid and Bowen, Asha. *Beat the Bugs: A handbook for community care workers in the Pilbara*. Telethon Kids Institute, June 2025.



Acknowledgement of country

We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Custodians of the land, sky and waters of Australia. We acknowledge the Elders and seek their wisdom in our work to improve the skin health of all children. We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have contributed to the development of this resource, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families across Australia who will use and benefit from the information contained in 'Beat the Bugs'.

Background

This Handbook was developed in response to the findings of four studies conducted with the Western Desert communities since 2007:

- Staying on track: Implementing the Australian Early Development Index in the Pilbara. Roz Walker (2007-2009) funded by BHP
- Aboriginal maternal health and child development program. Roz Walker (2010-2013) funded by BHP
- A PhD study titled: Revealing the public health significance of skin infections among Aboriginal children living in the Pilbara: A call to action in Western Australia. David Hendrickx (2018)
- An Honours research study: Talking skin: Attitudes and practices around skin infections, treatment options, and their clinical management in a remote region in Western Australia. Ingrid Amgarth-Duff (2016)

Acknowledgements

- We would like to acknowledge the following people and organizations for their input in developing this community handbook: Dee Fitzgerald and Kim Gossage (Puntukurnu Aboriginal Medical Service); Peter Johnson and Yvonne Mkandara (Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa); and Ellen Anshelevich and Andy Zheng, visiting student interns, Princeton University, USA.
- We would also like to acknowledge the generosity of Martu families and communities across the Western Desert and local health professionals and stakeholders for sharing their knowledge and experiences throughout the research studies and contributing to the development of this resource.

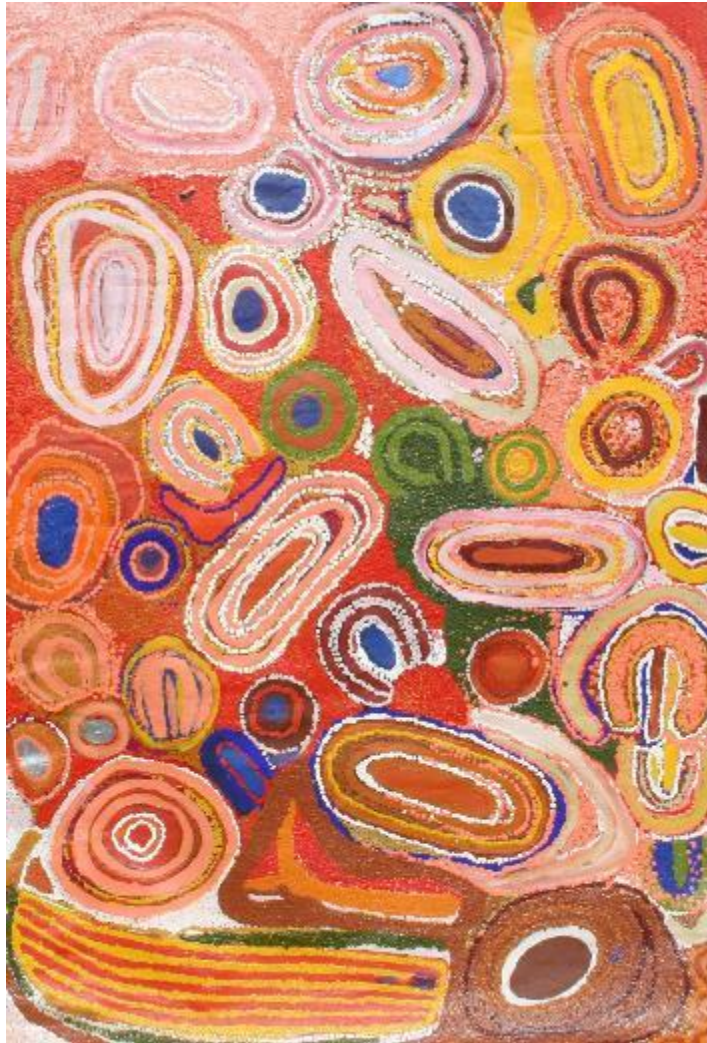
The purpose of this handbook

This handbook focuses on things Martu people told us would help keep skin healthy:

- Having home visits by Martu health workers to provide medicine
- Talking with families about skin infections and best treatment options
- Involving families and communities in decisions to get healthy skin for their kids.



Yarrkalpa – Hunting Ground, Parnngurr Area, 2013
by Kumpaya Girgirba, Ngamaru Bidu, Thelma Judson,
Reena Rogers, Yuwali Janice Nixon, Karnu Nancy Taylor,
Nola Taylor, Yikartu Bumba



Yinta, 2009, by Jakayu
Biljabu

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Why is skin so important?

- Skin is our largest organ, so we have to keep it safe!
- It **protects** our bodies, other organs, and our blood
- If your skin is sick, the rest of your body can get sick too



How can I keep my family's skin healthy?

- Wash body, hands and face with **soap**
- Wash children every day
- Eat good tucker every day

Other suggestions for **keeping skin healthy**:



Prevent

- **Wash towels, clothes and bedding** regularly and dry in sun
- Wear **shoes, long pants and long sleeves** in the bush

Care

- **Moisturise** dry, cracked skin
- **Cover skin sores** from dirt or scratching
- Apply **bush medicines**

Check

- If skin is not getting better, talk to your community care worker or **go to the clinic**

Beat the Bugs that attack your skin!



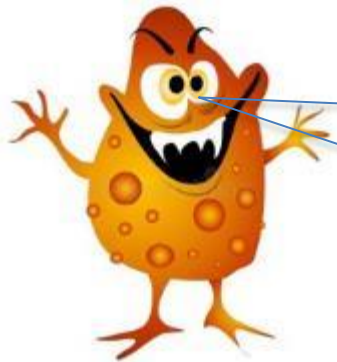
I cause **skin sores!**

Stephie the Strep bug



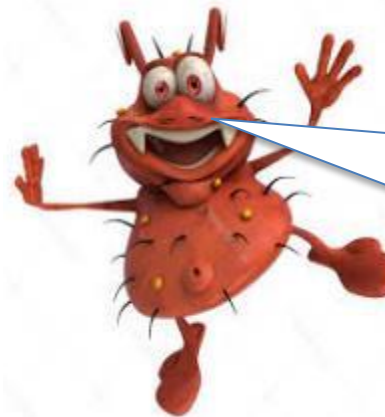
I burrow in your skin and cause **scabies!**

Scottie the Scabies Mite



I am Steph's cousin and I cause **skin sores and boils!**

Mr. Steve the Staph bug



I cause fungal infections like **tinea!**

Fred the Fungus



These bugs are so tiny you can't see them, but they are very harmful

Skin sores (Impetigo)

- Skin sores happen when **Stephie the Strep bug** and **Steve the Staph bug** get into the skin through cuts and bites
- This is very common in children

Look for:

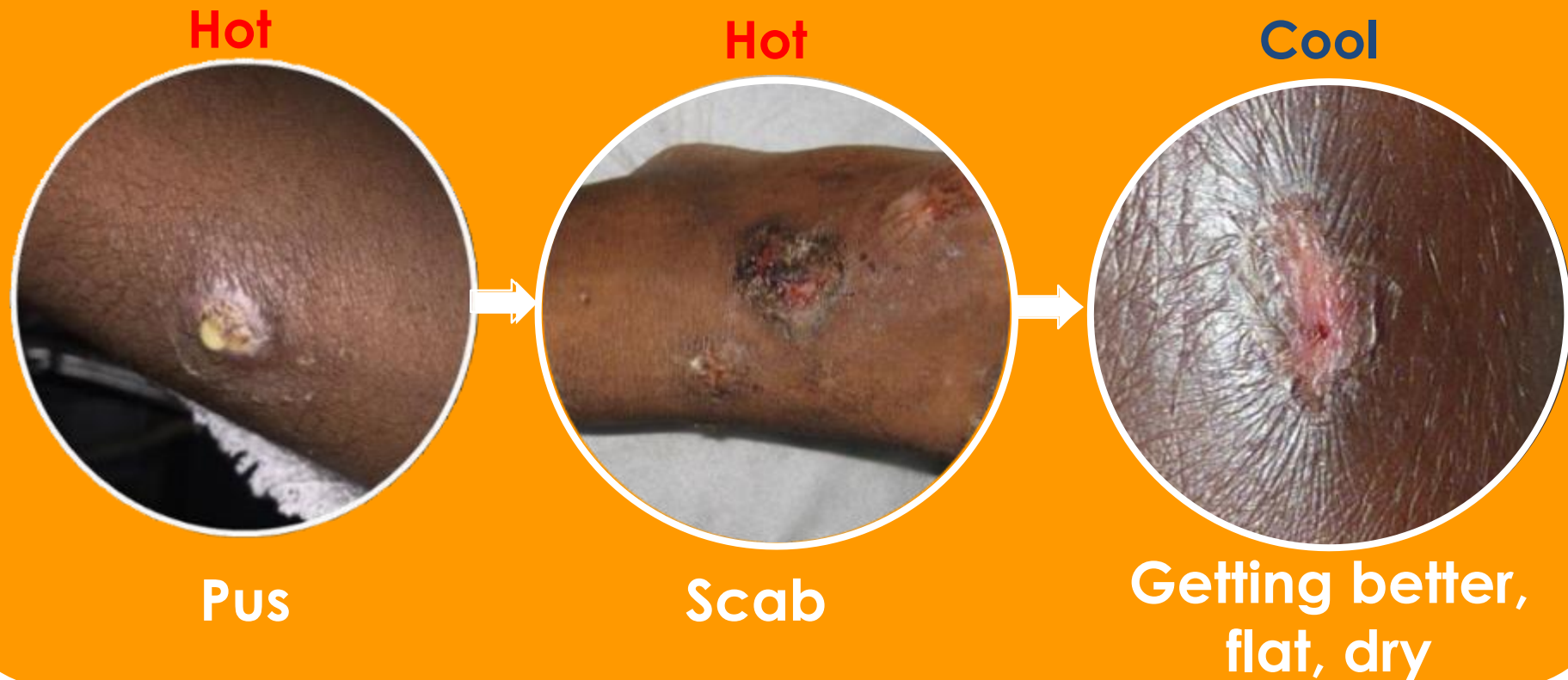
- Yellow-brown **scabbed sores**
- Sores with **pus**



What are the stages of skin sores?

✓ It is very important to treat skin sores (impetigo) **straight away**

Skin Sore Stages



Skin sores that are **HOT**

These have pus

These look like scabs



Pus



Scabs



Skin sores that are COOL

These sores are healing



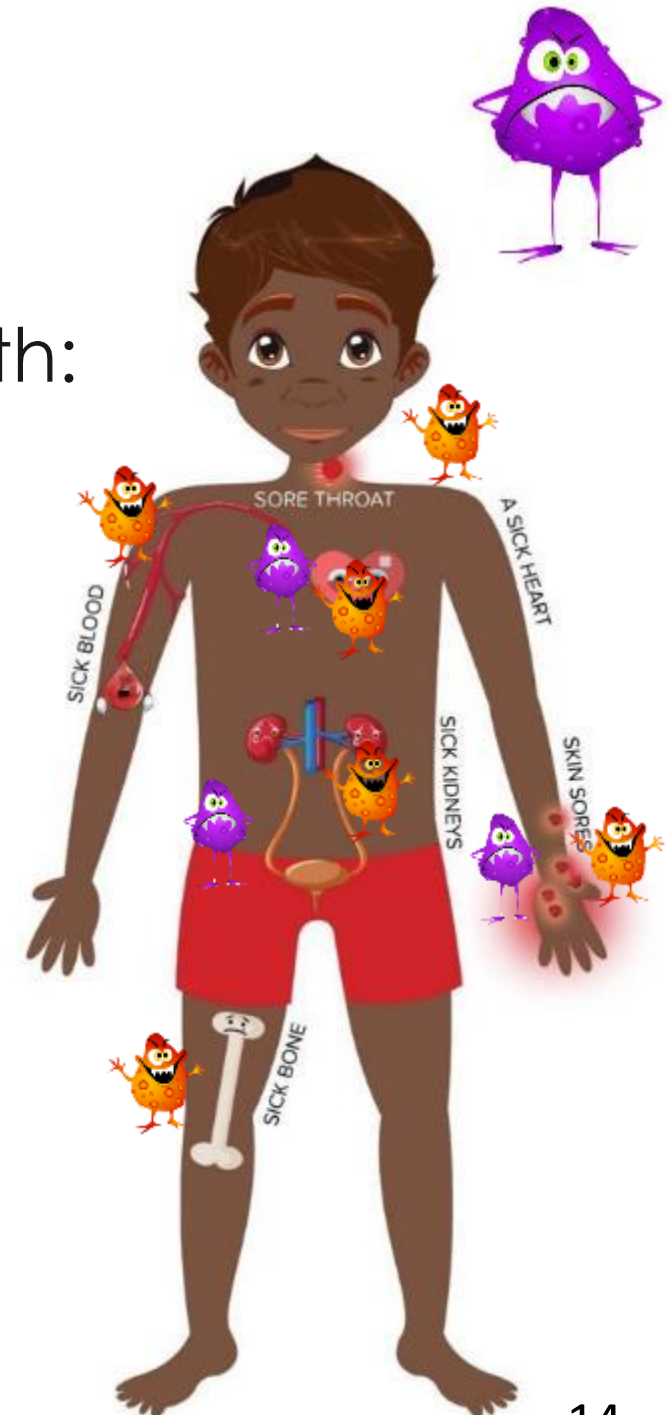
Stephie and
Steve bugs
are dead!!



How can skin sores hurt me?

Stephie the Strep bug and Steve the Staph bug can make you very sick with:

- Boils
- Sepsis = Sick Blood
- Bone and Joint infections
- Kidney Disease
- Rheumatic Heart Disease



If these sicknesses aren't treated properly,
you might have to go to **hospital**



What if I've got a **HOT** skin sore?

- Go to the clinic **straight away!**
- The **clinic will give you medicine** and tell you when and how to take it
- Your community care worker will help you with your treatment plan



What medicines treat skin sores?

A

Oral Septrin (drink
medicine OR tablet)
No needles



Morning and Night for 3 days

OR

B

Benzathine penicillin
needle
A needle in the thigh



One dose straight away

What if my medicine does not work?

They might be tricky bugs!

- First, make sure you took all your medicine
- **Tricky bugs look the same as skin sores** but sometimes a different medicine might be needed to beat them
- Talk to your **community care worker** or **nurse** if you are worried that the sores are **still hot!**



Hot skin sore

What if I've got **Tricky Bugs**?

- The clinic **will swab** to check what bug is there
- The doctor may give you **new medicine** when they find out what bug it is



Boils

- Happen when **Steve the Staph bug** gets into a hair root or sweat pore

Look for:

- One or more **red lumps**
- Sometimes **fever**
- Usually on face, neck, armpits, shoulders and bottom

- **Boils** often need incision and drainage
- **Boils** are treated with oral septrin **morning and night for 7 days**



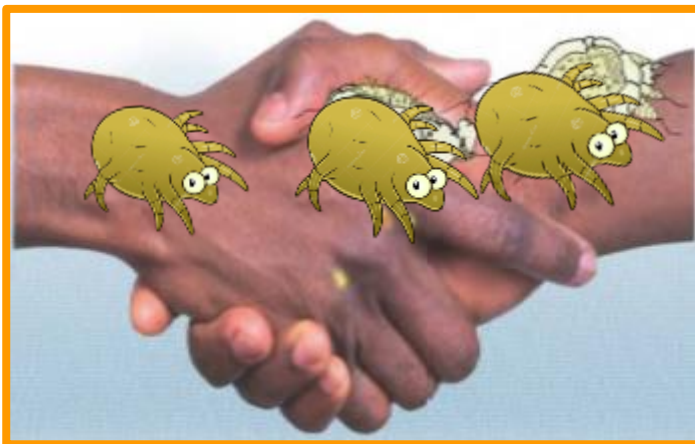
How can I protect my family from skin sores and boils?

- Wash children **every day** ✓
- Wash hands and face with **soap** and **water** ✓
- Wash and dry **towels, clothes** and **bedding** often ✓
- Wear **shoes, long pants, and long sleeves** in the bush ✓



Scabies

- You get scabies when **Scottie the Scabies mite** crawls under your skin and lays eggs
- You can get scabies from other people with scabies if you **touch their skin, their clothes, or the bed they sleep on**



How do I know if I've got **Scabies**?

Look for:

- **Itching**, sometimes over the whole body and more itchy at night
- **Scratches, sores** on wrists, elbows, knees, ankles and bottom, and between fingers and toes
- **Pimple-like bumps** on the hands and feet of babies and sometimes their whole body



What do I use if I've got Scabies?

A

OR

B

Topical permethrin cream 5% all over body



Apply straight away and again in 7 days

Oral ivermectin 200 micrograms/kg for children over 5 years old (or over 15kg)



One dose straight away and again in 7 days

How can I protect my family against Scabies?



- Wash your hands with **soap** and **dry** them properly
- If one person living in the house has scabies, all others living there or in close contact should be checked for scabies
- Treat scabies straight away.

A) If itchy skin or papules, treat for scabies with 2 doses, 7 days apart

B) If no symptoms, single dose of scabies treatment is needed



What do I do if I've got Scabies?

How to use the permethrin cream

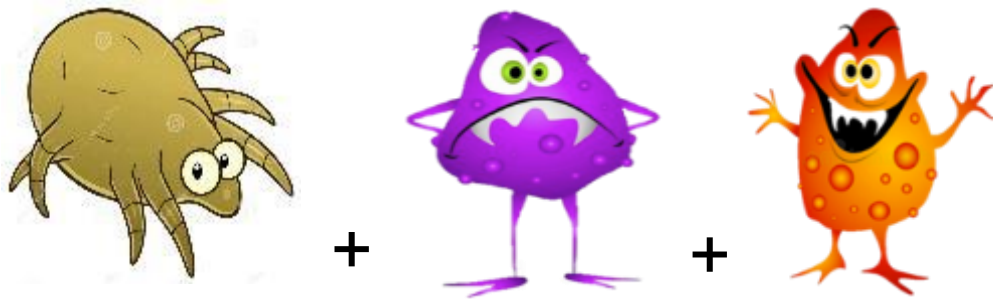
1. Rub cream on clean and dry skin **after bath/shower**
2. Rub cream over entire body **(head to toe)**
3. No cream on the eyes, lips and mouth
4. Rub more on hands again after washing
5. Leave permethrin cream on **for 8 hours**, then wash off
6. Repeat treatment in one week



Cover your whole body head to toe!

What is **Infected Scabies**?

- **Infected Scabies** happens when skin that has Scabies becomes **infected** with **Stephie the Strep bug** and **Steve the Staph bug**



Signs that scabies could be infected:
*Look for: **Scab** and **Pus***

Scab



Pus



What if I've got **infected scabies**?



- The clinic will give you medicines for **both** scabies and skin sores

Topical Permethrin
Cream for **Scabies**

OR

Ivermectin for **Scabies**



Oral Septrin
Drink medicine for **Skin Sores**

OR

Benzathine penicillin
needle for **skin sores**

- Check preference for treatment with families



Why is treating Skin Sores and Scabies so important?

- It makes our skin healthy so it can protect our bodies and **beat the bugs!**



- Kids with healthy skin are happier and **do well at school**

Tinea (Ringworm)



- **Fred the fungus** Tinea is a common **fungal infection** of the **skin, scalp and nails**
- **Fred the fungus** is a **different** bug and needs to be treated with **different medicines**
- It spreads mainly between **people and dogs (and cats)**
- It lasts a long time if you don't go to the clinic



How do I know if I've got **Tinea**?

Look for:

- **Scaly patches** on skin
- **Darker** and tougher skin
- **Broken** white or yellow nails



Remember: **Fred the fungus** can be anywhere!



Body tinea



Hand and thumbnail tinea



Nail tinea

What if I've got **Tinea**?



If your child or family member has tinea, **go to the clinic straight away!**



If **Fred the Fungus** is not treated, it can lead to other sickness, and you might need to go to the **hospital**.



What medicine is used to treat Tinea?



For small patches



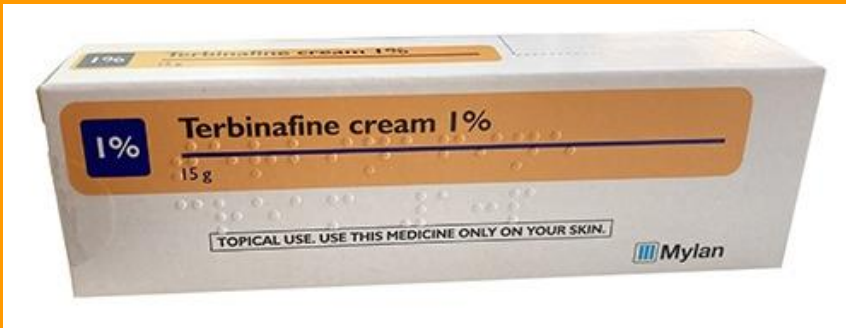
A

OR

B

Terbinafine 1% cream

Miconazole 2% cream



Morning and Night for 2 weeks or until cleared completely

Morning and night for 4-6 weeks

TINEA



What medicine is used to treat Tinea?



✓ For big rashes

➤ Oral terbinafine (Lamisil pill)



➤ Once a day for 2-4 weeks

What if I've got **Tinea** of the scalp?



Oral terbinafine (Lamisil pill) OR oral griseofulvin

➤ Once a day for 4-6 weeks or



Scalp Tinea

Photo from Dermnet <https://www.dermnetnz.org/>, Image courtesy of DermNet NZ
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/nz/legalcode>



+



Antifungal shampoo
(ketoconazole)



Wash hair and
scalp with this
shampoo often
while taking the
tablets



What if I've got **nail Tinea**?



Oral terbinafine (Lamisil pill)

- Once a day for 4-6 weeks (fingernails)
- Once a day for 12 weeks (toenails)



Oral griseofulvin

- Once a day for at least 4 months (fingernails)
- Once a day for at least 6 months (toenails)



How can I protect my family against Tinea?

- Treat tinea straight away
- Wash your hands with **soap** and **dry** them with a clean towel
- Check other family members and community pets for tinea
- Keep **dogs outside** the house
- **Avoid** sharing pillows, towels, hair combs or brushes, hair elastic, hats etc
- Use **bush medicines**



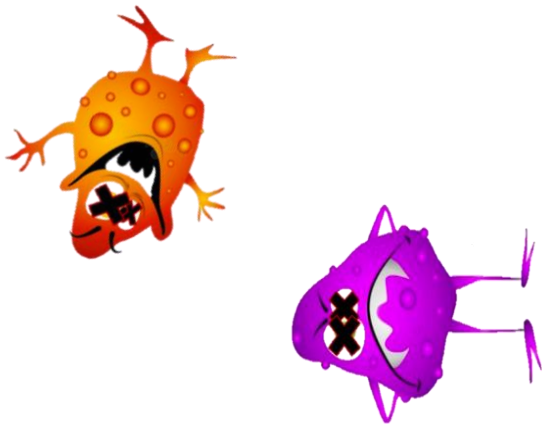
Head Lice

- Blood sucking visible **insects** that **live on the scalp**
- Spread between people as well as objects like combs, hats and hair ties.
- Very **common** in children
- Very **itchy**



Look for:

- **Moving adult lice in good light**
- **Brown or white eggs stuck on hair near the scalp**
- **Sores on the scalp**



How can I try to prevent head lice?

- **Avoid sharing** hair combs and brushes, hair ties, hats and scarves used on the head
- Keep **hair short** or **tied back**
- Regular **hot washing** of clothes, towels and bedding



How do we treat head lice?

- Most families make their **own diagnosis** of head lice
- Current guidelines recommend **topical lotions** for treatment

Topical pyrethrin shampoo. Repeat treatment after 1 week.

OR Dimeticone 4%. If using lotion, leave on for at least 8 hours then rinse out with warm water **OR** if using fast-acting gel, leave on for 15 minutes then rinse out with warm water. Repeat treatment after 1 week.

OR Malathion 0.5% shampoo, leave on for 12 hours, then rinse out with warm water. Repeat treatment after 1 week.

OR Malathion 1% foam, leave on for 30 minutes then rinse out with warm water. Repeat treatment after 1 week.



- A **combination of topical treatment and thorough combing** of the hair with a head lice comb is needed to remove live lice and eggs

Hand, foot and mouth virus

- Happens when **a virus** gets into your body
- Hand, foot and mouth (HFM) virus makes it easier for the other bugs to get into your skin
- It is very common in children
- If your child has HFM once, **they are unlikely to get it again**
- Always go to the clinic if your child's skin is not healthy



Look for:

- **Rash** in the mouth, on the hands and feet
- **Fever**
- **Runny nose**

How can I protect my kids against Hand, foot and mouth virus?

- Always wash your hands with **soap** after changing baby's nappies or going to the toilet
- Wash toys that children play with



- Keep kids home from childcare or school until the rash is gone to stop other kids getting sick

Environmental health is also important!

Healthy skin needs healthy homes!



Running water!



Taps that work!



Clean floors!



A clean towel
for everyone!



Rubbish in bins
and bags!



Places to store food.
Stove & fridge working!



Washing line, pegs and basket!

Environmental health is also important!

Healthy skin needs healthy communities



Good tucker in local store



**Work together to clean
up rubbish in your
community**



Keep dogs outside homes

**Have a yarn with the environmental health team about
ways to make your community healthy**



Keeping Skin Healthy

Keeps communities healthy and their children healthy, happy and doing well at school



Checklist of things to talk about

	Wash hands often*	Wear long pants, long sleeves and shoes in bush	Wash body, bedding, toys and clothes and dry properly	Go to clinic and treat straight away	Keep dogs outside home	Contagious when hot (pus and scab)	Check other family members	Healthy homes and communities
Skin sores/boils	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Scabies/infected scabies	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tinea	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hand, foot and mouth virus	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

***Especially after changing nappies and going to the toilet and before eating or preparing food**

Let's work together to beat the bugs!



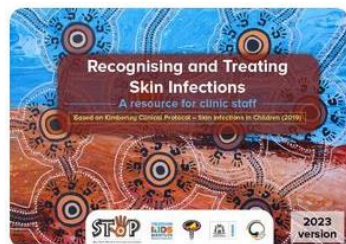
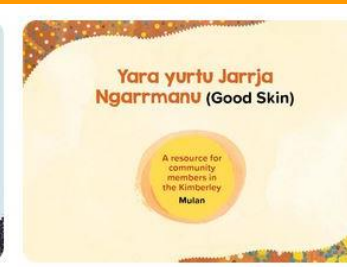
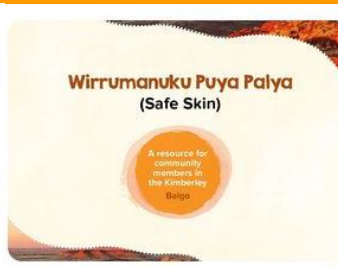
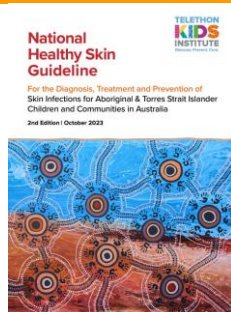
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Healthy Skin resources www.thekids.org.au/our-research/infectious-diseases/healthy-skin-and-arf-prevention/resource-hub/



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