

Allergy to moistened wipes rising

March 4 2014, by Marti Leitch

More and more people are developing an itchy, painful rash in an effort to stay clean. A dermatologist at The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center says a preservative in many types of pre-moistened wipes is linked to a dramatic rise in allergic reactions.

"In the last two or three years, we've suddenly seen a big increase in people with this type of [allergy](#)," said Dr. Matthew Zirwas, director of the contact dermatitis center at Ohio State's Wexner Medical Center. "For some patients, their rash has been unexplained and going on for years."

Zirwas says the chemical preservative is MI (methylisothiazolinone) and it has been around for years. MI is found in many water-based products like liquid soaps, hair products, sunscreen, cosmetics, laundry products and cleaners as well as pre-moistened personal hygiene products and [baby wipes](#).

"Concentrations of the preservative have increased dramatically in some products in the last few years, as manufacturers stopped using other preservatives like paraben and formaldehyde," Zirwas said.

The irritated skin can be red, raised, itchy and even blistering, appearing much like a reaction to poison ivy. The three most common areas affected by the allergic reaction include the face, from using soaps and shampoos, the fingers and hands, from handling the wipes, and the buttocks and genitals from using moistened flushable wipes.

Julie Omiatek, an Ohio mother of two, says it took a year to figure out her allergy. All that time, she endured the rashes on her hands and face.

"I tried to look for patterns and I journaled every time I had a flare-up," Omiatek said. "My allergist referred me to Dr. Zirwas' clinic and, lo and behold, it was a preservative in the baby wipes I was using. I was really surprised, because I thought that the allergy would have appeared with my first child."

"If someone suspects an allergy to moistened wipes, they need to stop using them for at least one month. A week or two isn't enough time," Zirwas said.

Zirwas is nationally-known as a kind of 'dermatologist detective.' He has spent nearly 10 years sleuthing out the causes of mysterious rashes that others can't solve. Over the years, he has identified allergies to shoe glue, hot tub chemicals, nickel in food, even a chemical in escalator hand rails. Patients have traveled from as far as Alaska to have him diagnose their skin allergies.

Zirwas says it isn't clear how many Americans might react to MI, but he says manufacturers are aware of the growing allergy problem and are working on alternatives.

Provided by Ohio State University Medical Center

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