

'Eraser challenge' latest harmful social media trend for kids

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(HealthDay)—It's spreading via social media: A "dare" where kids use

erasers to rub away the skin on their arms, often while reciting the alphabet or other phrases.

Players compare the resulting injuries, and the most injured player is the "winner."

The so-called "eraser challenge" has been circulating for about a year—but it's no joke, doctors warn.

"The eraser challenge may cause pain, burns to the [skin](#), scarring, local infections," said Dr. Michael Cooper, who directs the Burn Center at Staten Island University Hospital, in New York City.

With such injuries, "in severe though rare cases, life-threatening sepsis, gangrene and loss of limb may occur," he noted.

According to *USA Today*, East Iredell Middle School in Statesville, N.C., recently posted a warning on Facebook about the eraser challenge.

"Kids are rubbing an eraser across their skin while having to do or say something," the school said in its post. "It's causing serious burns and we've seen several cases of this."

Cooper concurred.

"The eraser challenge may appear harmless and an innocent show of bravado," Cooper said. "However, the consequences may be lifelong disfigurement and even death, and like other 'challenges,' should be avoided."

Dr. Robert Glatter is an emergency physician at Lenox Hill Hospital, also in New York City. He stressed that the risk of severe infections from the eraser challenge is a concern.

"Bacteria and dead skin cells can colonize erasers which have been rubbed on skin," he explained. "Erasers, which can be made of synthetic materials such as vinyl, plastics and synthetic rubber, have crevices that provide a warm and moist environment for bacteria to thrive. People also put erasers in their mouths, making them a set-up for polymicrobial infections that may be challenging to treat."

What to do? Glatter says parental monitoring and intervention is key.

"Parents need to have a frank discussion with their children about the dangers associated with the eraser challenge," he said. "If you find unexplained abrasions or wounds on your child's arms or legs, it's vital to ask them if they have been engaged in this challenge."

And Cooper noted that the eraser challenge isn't the only harmful [social media](#) trend out there.

"The advent of social media, and the endless search for recognition and attention has made posting videos while performing dangerous and senseless acts both commonplace and widespread," he said.

"The 'fire challenge' causes self-inflicted, life-threatening flame burns from igniting lighter fluid or alcohol poured on the skin," Cooper explained. "And, recently, a teenager was severely injured when he jumped into a lake he knew contained alligators."

As for the eraser [challenge](#), Glatter said, "it's simple: erasers belong on paper—not on your skin."

More information: There's more on skin infections at the [American Academy of Dermatology](#).

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