

Youngsters Illustrate What Eczema Feels Like Through Their Art

"It's hard to remember not to scratch."

"If I had my wish I would use this big eraser to completely erase my eczema."

"It feels like I'm standing in the middle of the desert being poked!"



MARKHAM, ON, February 14, 2011 –These statements, graphically depicted in the artwork of youngsters with eczema, help describe how children are affected by a common and sometimes life-altering skin condition, eczema. The “My Life with Eczema” national art contest is organized by the Eczema Awareness, Support and Education (EASE) Program that provides free, noncommercial educational material on eczema to sufferers, families and educators.

Why an art contest specifically for young eczema sufferers? In Canada alone, twelve to 25 per cent of children suffer from eczema and its accompanying pain, itch, sleepless nights and secondary infections¹. Eczema can interfere with school because of difficulties in concentration, cause low self esteem, and make sufferers feel self-conscious about their appearance. Some children even avoid social situations because of it. The contest was set up to give these children an opportunity to express how they feel as well as to let them know that they are not alone.

Unlike the vivid red tones that are associated with the itchy skin and inflammation that characterizes eczema, the young artists used all of the colours of the rainbow and a variety of mediums, including painting and drawing, to showcase their feelings. Each also provided an accompanying story on the challenges they face.

The submissions were judged by renowned Canadian cartoonist Lynn Johnston of the iconic “For Better or For Worse” series, celebrated Quebec multidisciplinary artist Lysanne Pepin, and three Canadian dermatologists: Dr. Harvey Lui, Dr. Ron Vender, and Dr. Marlene Dytoc.

“It was amazing to see the creative ways in which these children used art to represent their life with eczema,” said Johnston. “Typically we expect to see beauty in art but these works show us their frustration and pain. We see reality.”

“Judging these pieces is so, so difficult because we are not looking at pretty pictures”, said Pepin. “They’ve exposed their individual feelings in their own way and style and I applaud them all.”

The judging panel selected Maya Brassard from Comox, British Columbia as the winner of the contest. She will receive a \$1,500 Canada Savings Bond to assist with her future education. Two other young artists, Celeste Beaudette and Louisiane Camiré were named as finalists.

Please visit www.eczemaCanada.ca to view the artwork submitted by contestants.

About Eczema

Between four to six million children and adults in Canada suffer from eczema, a common, chronic, life-altering skin condition. Eczema (atopic dermatitis) is characterized by painful red, swollen, itchy and flaky skin. The majority of eczema cases are diagnosed in early childhood, and it is estimated that while some children may eventually outgrow eczema, about 80 per cent will have dry irritable skin throughout their lives. The condition is associated with the immune system’s response to environmental irritants, as well as with respiratory allergies and asthma. Environmental triggers are the most common elements that cause flare-ups. In general, people



Press Release

with eczema often have hypersensitive skin that does not tolerate certain topical stimulants or environmental contaminants.

About the Eczema Awareness, Support and Education (EASE[®]) Program

The Eczema Awareness, Support and Education (EASE) Program is a national and fully bilingual patient education program developed with the assistance of leading Canadian dermatologists to provide access to useful and accurate information about eczema. Supported through an education grant from Astellas Pharma Canada, Inc., the EASE Program has been recognized with four Public Education Awards from the Canadian Dermatology Association (2003, 2004, 2005, 2007).

The EASE Program website, www.eczemaCanada.ca, offers information on eczema including tips on speaking to a child's teacher about the condition, managing childhood triggers and how to control the itch. Parents, teachers and young children can also visit www.pennysworld.ca - a fun, child-friendly website that aims to help children understand eczema.

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