

Medicines Awareness

for care homes

Topical Applications

What is Topical Application?

Topical application refers to the method of applying medication to the skin. The medication can be in the form of an ointment, cream, gel or lotion and it can contain an active ingredient such as a steroid or antibiotic or could simply be an emollient to moisturise the skin.

Medication is administered in this way when a particular part of the skin or body needs to be treated.



Administration

Even though the medication is being applied to the skin rather than being taken it is important that staff adhere to good practice guidelines when handling them and that good records are kept.

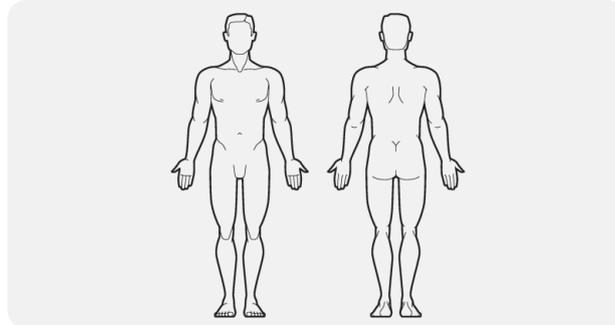
In particular care staff should;

- Always wear disposable gloves when administering creams, ointments etc. This is important for corticosteroid creams so that the cream and its active ingredients are not absorbed through staff member's skin.
- Ensure good hand hygiene and wash hands before and after administering the cream / ointment.
- Check that the preparation is in date
- Ensure that any tub in which gloved fingers have to be used to remove the cream is given a one-month expiry after opening and that unused cream is not returned to the tub as this will contaminate it. Pump dispensers can be kept for three months after opening.
- The date of opening should be written on the label and also on the tube/bottle in case the outer box is thrown away
- Always apply creams or ointments to clean skin
- When using creams or ointments, apply by smoothing them gently into the skin along the line of hair growth and do not rub in
- Any discontinued or out-of-date preparation should be disposed of as per disposal procedure, recording what has been sent for destruction

Record Keeping- Best practice

- A registered nurse or senior care assistant with appropriate training should complete a Separate MAR chart for each topical medication prescribed. The MAR should be checked and countersigned by an appropriately qualified member of staff.
- The MAR should be kept in the resident's room and the care assistant, registered nurse or senior care assistant should sign the MAR when they have applied a topical medicine in line with the instructions.

- The MAR chart should state 'see topical medication MAR chart'.
- At the end of each 28-day cycle the topical medication MAR should be filed with the regular MAR chart to provide a full record of administration.
- Body maps should be used to ensure that all staff are aware of where to apply the preparation



- Records should be kept of any creams applied by nurses or carers. This record should be used to record details of where on the body the cream needs to be applied as well as how often and the initials of the carer that applied it.

Important Information

When someone in your care is prescribed medication in the form of a topical preparation it is important to be aware of the following information;

- Where is the product to be applied on the body?
- How often should it be applied?
- Is there an end date or should it continue to be used indefinitely?

Further information about the condition should be detailed in the care plan and it should also be documented if there is a need for a follow up appointment.

It is also important to know how much of the product should be used and where on the body it should be applied. Using an accurate amount can be particularly important for topical steroids. Often the amount required is described as a fingertip unit FTU, and the number of fingertip units required for various parts of the body are described below



- One hand: apply one fingertip unit
- One arm: apply three fingertip units
- One foot: apply two fingertip units
- One leg: apply six fingertip units
- Face and neck: apply 2.5 fingertip units
- Trunk, front & back: 14 fingertip units
- Entire body: about 40 units

For further advice, please contact the medicines management team at Walsall CCG

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