

THE PEBBLES STUDY

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Welcome to our second PEBBLES newsletter

PEBBLES: Pandemic challenges

Who could possibly have predicted what was soon to follow when we sent out our newsletter last year? We hope all PEBBLES families have kept safe and well during this challenging period. Covid-19 undoubtedly had a significant impact on PEBBLES; however, recruitment and assessments have continued throughout the pandemic. You can read more about these challenges in [an article published last year](#). From April 2020 we had moved all recruitment and 6-week assessments online and were impressed with how our participants adapted with us. Our 12-month assessments are considered essential, as they collect critical data, and therefore continued face-to-face. We are incredibly grateful to the 325 families who have already completed the 12-month assessment. If you are yet to book in, we would love to see you. You can contact us at pebbles-study@unimelb.edu.au to organize your booking.

Avoiding skincare with common allergens for children with eczema

Our site investigator at the Murdoch Children's Research Institute, Professor Mimi Tang, is an internationally renowned expert in the field of allergy and recently featured in an article discussing how creams containing [common allergens](#) should be avoided in children with eczema. You can read more [here](#).

Do you have 'old man's hands'?

You may recall us looking at your baby's hands and feet during our PEBBLES assessments to try and identify if they have what is known as 'palmar hyperlinearity' or 'old man's hands'. Associate Professor Adrian Lowe, PEBBLES' lead investigator, recently published [an article](#) showing that in young adults, having "old man hands" was a good way of identifying if someone had a mutation in the Filaggrin gene (FLG), which is known to be linked to the development of eczema and allergy. We are hoping that through assessing the hands (and feet) of PEBBLES babies, we may be able to predict which babies might go on to develop eczema and allergy in later life. This may lead to us changing how we manage these children's skin.

Air pollution and eczema in adults

While there is limited information on risk factors for eczema in adults, air pollution has been suggested as a possible association. Five of our PEBBLES investigators and their colleagues discuss this recent evidence in a [new publication](#).

Do moisturisers help prevent eczema?

Eczema and allergy are related to impaired skin barrier. Recent research reveals that some emollients can improve hydration, reduce itch, and improve skin barrier function. Whether this then translates into regular use of emollients being an effective way to prevent babies developing eczema and allergy is still open to debate. A/Prof Lowe recently co-authored a [Cochrane review](#) (a systematic review of research) which indicates that regular emollients that you can buy without a prescription, are unlikely to prevent eczema. As our PEBBLES study uses a unique prescription-only formulation that has been designed to improve skin barrier, and previous phases of our trial have had promising results, we remain hopeful that our treatment will be effective. You can read more about the early phases of PEBBLES at our [website](#)

Where to next with PEBBLES?

Recruitment is now complete for PEBBLES. We enrolled our 425th participant at the end of March 2021, however we are far from finishing up. We have quite a few of our participants yet to complete their 12-month assessment with us – and we have plans to keep in touch via an annual survey until your baby turns seven. This survey will be very similar to the one you completed when your baby turned one. We will be in touch within the next few months with more information about our future plans for PEBBLES.