

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Assessment of hand eczema severity: What's new?

To the Editor,

Hand eczema (HE) is a multifactorial and impairing skin disease affecting up to 10% of the general population per year, and an updated guideline for diagnosis, prevention and treatment of HE was recently presented.¹ An objective assessment of the HE severity is crucial; not only in randomized controlled trials investigating new potential treatments or preventive programmes, and in observational studies of biomarkers, but also on a daily basis in the clinic monitoring treatment responses. According to the Hand Eczema Core Outcome Set initiative, the Hand Eczema Severity Index (HECSI) was the most commonly used tool for HE severity assessments in studies published between 2009 and 2019.² Although HECSI is frequently used, no detailed guidelines or instructions including photographs of morphological signs have until now been available for healthcare personnel. Accordingly, the accuracy as well as consistency of the HECSI-scoring may vary from site to site. In an attempt to plug this gap, and as a supplement to the HECSI tool, we have now constructed the webpage www.hecsiscore.com, comprising detailed guidelines for the use of HECSI. The webpage has free access and is ready to use.

HECSI was first constructed and validated for intra- and inter-rater reliability in 2005,³ and recently further validated for its interpretability and responsiveness to change including reports on the minimal clinically important change.^{4,5} HECSI incorporates both the severity of six morphological signs (i.e., erythema, scaling, infiltration/papulation, vesicles, fissures, and oedema) and the extent of the eczema divided into five areas of both hands (i.e., fingertips, fingers [excl. fingertips], palm of hands, back of hands and wrists) resulting in a total score ranging between 0 and 360 points. To expedite the HECSI calculations and increase the consistency of the HECSI-scoring, we have constructed an online calculator with integrated photographs of each morphological sign with increasing severity (i.e., from mild to severe) on the webpage www.hecsiscore.com.

With increasing focus on patient-reported outcomes, a patient-friendly version of the HECSI, that is, a version which will be accessible to patients, may be considered as the next step, since the current options for patient-reported HE severity assessment tools are limited.⁶ With a detailed severity assessment, patients may monitor their own disease and report improvements or deteriorations to the clinic. Until now, HECSI and other severity measurement tools have been validated in fair skin only, emphasizing the need for modified versions for use in patients with skin of colour.

To sum up, the most commonly used HE severity assessment tool, HECSI, has been thoroughly validated and an online scoring platform on the webpage www.hecsiscore.com is now available for clinicians and for use in clinical studies with free access.

KEYWORDS

epidemiology, hand eczema, Hand Eczema Severity Index, outcome measure

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None to declare.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

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