Epidemic of severe infections of skin, scalp, and nails: Overuse of over-the-counter creams linked to antifungal resistance

A report by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention claims antifungal creams and combinations of antifungal treatments with corticosteroids are likely to be contributing to the rise and spread of severe skin, scalp, and nail fungal infections.

In 2023, dermatologists detected the first known cases in the US of highly contagious drug-resistant fungal skin infections that don’t respond to the few fungal treatments we have.

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To get a handle on the situation, researchers at the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have examined a whole year’s worth of antifungal prescriptions in the US, to understand which types of clinicians are dishing out what drugs.

As with the rise of antibiotic resistance among bacteria, overuse of antifungals gives potentially pathogenic fungi ample opportunity to find ways to thwart the drugs, especially when they are prescribed for the type of wrong infection or not used properly.

“The actual volume of topical antifungal use among the study population is likely considerably higher than that identified in this study because most topical antifungals can be purchased over the counter without a prescription,” the researchers note.

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