



Poor living conditions get under healthy skin

SKIN disease will remain widespread in Territory Aboriginal communities unless governments tackle overcrowding and poor sanitation, an academic says.

Associate Professor Ross Andrews from the Menzies School of Health Research said community-based programs had resulted in marked reductions in the rates of skin infections in children across Arnhem Land.

But, he said, the health burden of skin infections — which are linked to kidney disease, rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease — remained unacceptably high.

“Unless we address the underlying causes of these extremely high rates of skin infections such as overcrowding, difficulties with sanitation, poor educational outcomes and continuing socioeconomic disadvantage it is unlikely that we can achieve lasting reductions in health impacts,” he said.

As part of the East Arnhem Regional Healthy Skin Program, health workers have, over the past three years, visited houses in their local communities to check children for skin infections.

The program aims to reduce the prevalence of scabies, skin sores and tinea for children aged 0 to 14 years.

— TARA RAVENS