

# Work related Dermatitis

Work related dermatitis (often called eczema) is one of the main causes of ill-health for catering and cleaning staff and is a very painful condition. However, dermatitis is easily prevented using good hygiene techniques.

## What is dermatitis?

Dermatitis is a skin condition caused by contact with something that irritates the skin or causes an allergic reaction. It usually occurs where the irritant touches the skin, but not always.

If you look at skin that has dermatitis, you could see one or all of these signs:

- Redness
- Scaling/flaking
- Blistering
- Weeping
- Cracking
- Swelling



There are two different types of contact dermatitis:

Irritant and Allergic

## What causes irritant contact dermatitis?

It can occur quickly after contact with a strong irritant, or over a longer period from repeated contact with weaker irritants. Irritants can be chemical, biological, mechanical or physical. Repeated and prolonged contact with water (e.g. more than 20 hand washes or having wet hands for more than 2 hours per shift) can also cause irritant dermatitis.

Examples of Irritant contact dermatitis:

- Wet work
- Soaps, shampoos and detergents
- Solvents
- Some food (e.g. onions)
- Oils and greases
- Dusts
- Acids and alkalis



## What causes allergic contact dermatitis?

This can occur when the sufferer develops an allergy to a substance. Once someone is 'sensitised', it is likely to be permanent and any skin contact with that substance will cause allergic contact dermatitis. Often skin sensitisers are also irritants.

Some of the more common causes of allergic contact dermatitis include:

- Some hair dyes
- UV cured printing inks
- Adhesives
- Some food (e.g. shellfish, flour, garlic)
- Wet cement
- Some plants (e.g. chrysanthemums)



Safety point	Why?	How do you do this?
<p><b>AVOID direct contact</b> Avoid direct contact between un-protected hands and substances, products and wet work where this is sensible and practical, for instance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get rid of the substance/product/wet work all together.</li> <li>• Substitute the product/substance for something less harmful.</li> <li>• Introduce controls (such as tools or equipment) to keep a safe working distance between skin and substances/products/wet work.</li> </ul>	<p>Contact with certain substances and products and/or regular wet work may cause dermatitis</p>	<p><b>What do you do to avoid contact?</b></p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 150px; width: 100%;"></div>
<p><b>PROTECT the Skin</b> Avoiding contact will not always be possible so:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide suitable personal protective equipment such as gloves.</li> <li>• Tell workers to wash their hands before eating and drinking, and before wearing gloves. Ensure suitable cleaning systems exist for mobile workers.</li> <li>• Provide suitable mild skin cleaning and moisturising cream and washing facilities with hot and cold water.</li> <li>• Remind workers to wash any contamination from their skin promptly.</li> <li>• Provide soft (cotton or disposable paper) towels for drying the skin. Tell workers about the importance of thorough drying after washing.</li> <li>• Protect the skin by moisturizing as often as possible and particularly at the end of the day – this replaces the natural oils that help keep the skin’s protective barrier working properly.</li> <li>• Use suitable barrier creams before and during work.</li> </ul>	<p>Limiting work likely to cause or promote dermatitis, providing personal protective equipment and ensuring hands are cared for will reduce the likelihood of your staff developing this condition</p>	<p><b>What do you do to protect?</b></p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 350px; width: 100%;"></div>

## Safety point

### **CHECK hands regularly**

- Check hands regularly for the first signs of itchy, dry or red skin.
- When skin problems are spotted early, they can be treated, which can stop them from getting too bad.
- Get advice from your GP if you suspect that you may have skin problems.

Check regularly that all these actions are carried out in practice.

If protective gloves are the only option then it is essential to ensure you have the correct glove for the type of work.

When you select protective gloves, base your choice on the work, the wearer and the environment they work in. You need to consider the following five factors:

- Identify the substances handled.
- Identify all other hazards.
- Consider the type and duration of contact.
- Consider the user – size and comfort.
- Consider the task.

## Why?

Regular monitoring allows for prompt identification of any problems before the condition becomes too serious.

Poorly fitting or inadequate gloves may not protect the wearer properly or may trap water and other substances close to the skin resulting in dermatitis

## How do you do this?

### What do you do to check?

Do you use gloves?

Yes  No

Gloves to be used:

Job	Gloves to be worn