

Dermatitis

What is Dermatitis?

Contact dermatitis is inflammation of the skin (also called eczema) caused by contact with a range of materials. These include detergents, toiletries, chemicals and even natural products like foods and water (if contact is prolonged or frequent). It can affect all parts of the body, but it is most common to see the hands affected. This guidance note is relevant to dermatitis and its prevention in a work environment.

There are three main types of contact dermatitis:

- irritant contact dermatitis
- allergic contact dermatitis
- contact urticaria.

Irritant contact dermatitis is caused by things that dry out and damage the skin, e.g. detergents, solvents, oils and prolonged or frequent contact with water.

Allergic contact dermatitis occurs when someone becomes allergic to something that comes into contact with his or her skin. The allergic reaction can show up hours or days after contact. Common causes include chemicals in cement, hair products, epoxy resins and some foods.

Urticaria is a different kind of allergy. It occurs within minutes of the material touching the skin. Things like plants, foods and natural rubber latex gloves can cause it.

Remember that these diseases could also develop when people expose their skin to physical agents, biological agents, plants, mechanical forces and sun at work. You should remember exposure to these substances can happen during leisure/DIY activities.

Signs and Symptoms of Dermatitis

- Dry, red and itchy skin is usually the first sign.
- Swelling, flaking, blistering, cracking and pain can follow.

Sometimes the consequences of contact with a material are immediately visible.

Sometimes contact occurs without apparent effect. However, every contact can cause minute amounts of 'invisible' damage to the skin that can build up until more serious signs are seen.

Work Activities that can cause Dermatitis include

Activity/ Industry	Irritant	Possible Type of Dermatitis
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Catering and Food Processing	Animal Products, Enzymes, Natural Acids	Irritant & Allergic
Cleaners	Bleaches, Detergents, etc	Irritant
Construction Workers	Contact With Wet Cement	Allergic
Engineering	Contact With Metal-Working Fluids	Irritant
Glass and Ceramic Workers	Glaze Suspensions	Irritant
Hairdressers	Shampoos, Dyes, Bleaches, Soaps, etc	Irritant & Allergic
Laboratory and Chemical Workers	Acids and Alkalis	Irritant
Printers	Inks and Solvents	Allergic

How do I prevent skin problems in my business – What do I need to do as an employer?

How to prevent dermatitis.

Following 3 simple steps can help prevent dermatitis:

- Avoid contact with materials that cause dermatitis
- Protect the skin
- Check for early signs of dermatitis.

So take all the steps you can to avoid contact with materials that cause dermatitis by changing the task or process. Some examples of how you can do this are given below.

Avoid contact by:

- substituting a more hazardous material with a safer alternative
- automating the process
- enclosing the process as much as possible
- using mechanical handling
- not using the hands as tools
- using a safe working distance.

Protect the skin by:

- telling workers how to look after their skin
- reminding them to wash any contamination from their skin promptly
- telling them about the importance of thorough drying after washing
- providing soft cotton or paper towels
- supplying moisturising pre-work and after-work creams
- providing appropriate protective clothing/gloves
- making sure gloves are made of suitable material
- selecting gloves that are the right size and right for the task to be done
- using and storing gloves correctly
- replacing gloves when necessary.

Carry out regular skin checks as:

- regular skin checks can spot the early stages of dermatitis.

- early detection can prevent more serious dermatitis from developing.
- steps can be taken to start treating the condition.
- checks can help indicate a possible lapse in your preventative measures
- the need to reassess the situation.

Control Measures

There are no published exposure standards for skin exposure, so it is important to prevent or minimise contact. Typical control measures should include:

- ensuring high standards of personal hygiene: washing facilities, clean work clothing, etc
- ensuring that all control measures are maintained and used correctly
- operation of a health surveillance system: pre screening before use and periodic health checks by GP or an occupational health nurse
- performing workplace monitoring and regular checks to ensure that control measures are being used and are effective: conduct a further risk assessment if substance or its use are changed
- PPE: care should be taken if latex gloves are used
- providing skin-care products: barrier creams and moisturisers
- provision of suitable ventilation or extraction systems (dusts, fumes, vapours and mists): fume cupboards, local exhaust ventilation all being subject to a statutory inspection
- provision of training and information: risks to health, symptoms of sensitisation, importance of reporting symptoms, proper use of controls, the need to report failures of control measures, etc
- substitution of the sensitiser (e.g. switch from latex gloves to nitrile or silicone).

Legal Requirements

Employers and employees need to comply with the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (as amended) (known as COSHH). They require employers to assess risks, provide adequate control measures, ensure the use and maintenance of these; provide information, instruction and training; and in appropriate cases, health surveillance.

This includes adequate control of exposure to materials in the workplace that can cause ill health such as dermatitis.

Please refer to the guidance note on COSHH for further information.

Long-term exposure will cause the symptoms to become increasingly severe. If a worker has become sensitised, a full medical examination is required and the occurrence must be reported to the enforcing authority (either HSE or local authority EHO) as required by the requirements of the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995 (known as RIDDOR), if it is related to workplace exposure.

OVERVIEW

- Look at your processes to see if there is a problem.
- Check your accident book (BI 510) or equivalent.
- Determine whether the substance causing the problem can be replaced with one that does not.
- Carry out an assessment of the task that presents the risk.
- Introduce a “health screening” programme.
- Keep the workplace free of contamination.
- Try to modify the way people work so that there is less chance of skin contact.
- Actively promote good standards of personal hygiene and use of skin reconditioning products, such as barrier creams and moisturisers, if appropriate
- Provide suitable protective equipment and make sure it is looked after.
- Monitor for symptoms.
- Make everybody aware of the hazard and of the measures that are in place to protect them.

Further Information on Dermatitis is available at:

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/skin/>

<http://www.patient.co.uk/showdoc/23068731/>

[http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Eczema-\(contact-dermatitis\)/Pages/Introduction.aspx?url=Pages/what-is-it.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Eczema-(contact-dermatitis)/Pages/Introduction.aspx?url=Pages/what-is-it.aspx)

Organisations that may be able to offer assistance to people with dermatitis are listed below:

National Eczema Society
<http://www.eczema.org/>
 Tel: 0800 0891122

British Association of Dermatologists
<http://www.bad.org.uk/about/>
 Tel: 0207-383-0266