

SECTION 5 SKIN CARE



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SECTION 5 – SKIN CARE

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5.2 Hand care

5.2.1 What are work-related skin diseases?

Work-related skin problems are very common. They can happen in most workplaces although they happen more in certain high-risk jobs. They can be very costly, not just through the suffering individuals experience (which can lead to ending their careers), but also because they can be a burden for employers who are left with sickness absence, recruitment, training and compensation expenses.

5.2.2 What are work-related skin problems?

Work-related skin problems are caused or made worse by exposure to/coming into contact with substances such as chemicals, and also through having wet hands for long periods, while at work. Dermatitis (also known as eczema) is by far the most common, but urticaria and skin cancer are also problems.

5.2.3 What should I do about it?

The good news is that although these problems are common and preventable. There are simple, cost-effective steps employers and workers can take to avoid skin problems at work, and to manage them if they do happen, using the Avoid, Protect and Check approach.

5.2.4 How does skin come into contact with chemicals?

- Immersing hands (sometimes legs) into chemicals
- Direct handling of contaminated work pieces
- Contact with contaminated surfaces (e.g. workbench, tools, clothing and containers)
- Splashing (e.g. when liquid or powdery chemicals are mixed or handled)
- In deposits in the air
- Wet work (e.g. frequent hand washing)

Note on wet work

Prolonged or frequent contact with water, particularly in combination with soaps and detergents, can cause dermatitis (e.g. a long time spent washing up or frequent hand washing). 'Wet work' is the term used to describe such tasks in the workplace.

5.2.5 What are the high-risk jobs and workplaces?

- Catering
- Hairdressing
- Health services
- Dentistry
- Printing
- Metal machining
- Motor vehicle repair
- Construction

5.2.6 How do I prevent skin problems in my business?

- Some products contain substances that can harm the skin or enter the body through skin contact. The product label or material safety data sheet should tell you if this is the case. Look for hazard warning signs, risk and safety phrases.
- Not all harmful substances come in labelled containers. Substances can be generated during work activities (e.g. fumes). Remember that handling some 'natural' substances like foods and flowers can cause skin problems too. If you are unsure if a substance emitted from a work process or natural substance you are handling is harmful.
- Prolonged or frequent contact with water, particularly in combination with soaps and detergents, can cause dermatitis. 'Wet work' is the term used to describe tasks in the workplace that can cause this.
- If their work does involve skin contact like this you can take simple steps to reduce the risk and prevent skin problems.

5.2.7 What should I do?

Use the **APC** approach.

Avoid direct contact between unprotected hands and substances, products and wet work where this is sensible and practical, for instance:

- ✓ Get rid of the substance/product/wet work altogether.
- ✓ Substitute the product/substance for something less harmful.
- ✓ Introduce controls (such as tools or equipment) to keep a safe working distance between skin and substances/products/wet work.

Protect the skin. Avoiding contact will not always be possible. So:

- ✓ Provide suitable personal protective equipment such as gloves. This can be complex so there is advice on glove selection
- ✓ Provide mild skin cleaning cream that will do the job and washing facilities with hot and cold water
- ✓ Tell workers to wash their hands before eating and drinking, and before wearing gloves. Suitable cleaning systems exist for mobile workers
- ✓ Remind workers to wash any contamination from their skin promptly.
- ✓ Provide soft cotton or disposable paper towels for drying the skin. Tell workers about the importance of thorough drying after washing
- ✓ Protect the skin by moisturising 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
- ✓ Use suitable pre-work creams

Check hands regularly for the first signs of itchy, dry or red skin:

- ✓ Regular skin checks will help spot the early signs of dermatitis or other skin problems caused by skin exposure
- ✓ The earlier that health effects are recognised and treated, the more likely it is that the sufferer will make a full recovery
- ✓ Checks can show whether an adequate standard of control is being maintained. They may give an early indication of lapses in control and a need to reassess the controls used

Finally, check regularly that all these actions are carried out in practice.

Individuals who suspect they may have a skin problem should visit their General Practitioner for advice and treatment if needed. The NHS also has useful information and advice on dermatitis, urticaria and skin cancer.

5.2.8 Choosing the right gloves to protect skin: a guide for employers

Protecting against substances in the workplace

The most effective and reliable way to prevent skin problems is to design and operate processes to avoid contact with harmful substances. So take all the steps you can to achieve this before resorting to the use of protective gloves.

Protective gloves tend to be less effective than other control measures but if avoiding contact is impractical or is not enough to protect employees then gloves may be needed. 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

Identify the substances handled

Gloves differ in design, material and thickness. No glove material will protect against all substances and no gloves will protect against a specific substance forever.

Water/‘wet work’

- ❖ Prolonged or frequent contact with water, particularly in combination with soaps and detergents, can cause dermatitis. ‘Wet work’ is the term used to describe tasks in the workplace that can cause this
- ❖ To protect the hands from ‘wet work’, choose a glove that meets the European Standard EN374-2. This shows that the gloves are waterproof

5.2.9 Substances in products, created by work processes and 'natural' substances

Substances in products

Some products contain substances that can harm the skin or enter the body through skin contact. The product label or material safety data sheet should tell you if this is the case. These may also give information on what protective gloves to use. If this is missing then try contacting the product supplier or manufacturer for help.

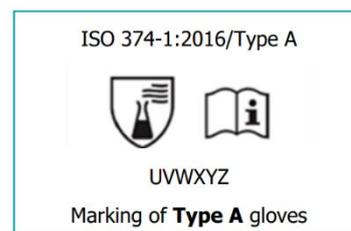
Substances created by work processes and 'natural' substances

Not all harmful substances come in labelled containers. **Substances can be generated during work activities** (e.g. wood dust from sanding, solder fumes). Remember that handling some 'natural' substances like foods and flowers can cause skin problems too. If you are unsure if a substance produced by a work process or a natural substance you are handling is harmful, you can get help from a variety of sources, e.g. your trade association or this website.

To protect hands from substances/chemicals **choose a glove that meets the European Standard EN374**. But make sure the glove material you choose protects against the substances being handled.

Glove manufacturers usually produce charts to show how well their gloves perform against different substances. Manufacturers use three key terms, breakthrough time, permeation rate and degradation:

- Breakthrough time is the time a chemical takes to permeate through the glove material and reach the inside. Permeation is a process by which a chemical can pass through a material without going through pinholes or pores or other visible openings. This tells you how long you can use a glove for
- The permeation rate is the amount that then permeates through. The higher the rate the more of the chemical will move through the glove. Choose a low rate
- Some chemicals can destroy the glove material. It may get harder, softer or may swell. Degradation indicates the deterioration of the glove material on contact with a specific chemical. Choose gloves with an excellent or good degradation rating.



- You can use manufacturers' charts to identify the best gloves for the chemicals being handled or glove manufacturers can help with this step.
- The performance of glove materials can vary slightly from manufacturer to manufacturer, so base your selection on the correct manufacturers' data.
- Keep in mind that the manufacturers' data is for pure chemicals, not mixtures. When you mix chemicals, their properties can change. As a rule of thumb, base your glove selection on the component in the mixture with the shortest breakthrough time. However, the only way to be absolutely sure that a glove performs well against the mixture is to have it tested.
- Some people develop an allergy to gloves made of natural rubber latex. Choose non-latex gloves unless there are no alternatives that give the protection needed. If you must use latex, choose low-protein, powder-free gloves.

Identify all other hazards for hands

- ❖ Identify any other hazards present. For example, is there a risk of, abrasion, cuts, puncture or high temperature? There are chemical protective gloves that also give protection against mechanical hazards (those marked EN388) and thermal hazards (those marked EN407)

Consider the type and duration of contact

- Will gloves be worn for a short time intermittently or for long periods? Comfort is more important for longer wear. Generally, thicker, robust gloves offer greater protection than thinner gloves but thinner gloves offer better dexterity.
- Will contact be from occasional splashes or by total immersion? Short gloves are fine to protect against splashes. If hands are immersed (and you can justify that this is unavoidable), choose a length greater than the depth of immersion.

Consider the user - size and comfort

- Gloves should fit the wearer. Tight gloves can make hands feel tired and lose their grip. Too large gloves can create folds; these can impair work and be uncomfortable. It can help to use sizing charts.
- Comfortable gloves are more likely to be worn. Involve employees in the selection process and give them a reasonable choice to pick from. This can sometimes promote buy-in to wearing them.
- Hands can sweat inside gloves making them uncomfortable to wear. Getting staff to take glove breaks, removing gloves for a minute or so before hands get too hot and sweaty, can help air the hands. You could also consider supplying separate cotton gloves to wear under protective gloves. These can increase comfort by absorbing sweat. They can be laundered and reused.

Consider the task

Gloves should not hamper the task. If wet/oily objects are handled, choose gloves with a roughened/textured surface for good grip. Select gloves that balance protection with dexterity. Ensure the gloves selected meet any standards required for the task, e.g. sterile gloves, food grade gloves. Consider whether colour is important, e.g. to show up contamination.

Once you have selected your gloves tell your employees how to use them properly to protect themselves. Tell them when they should be replaced, and if they are reusable gloves ask them to rinse them before removal (if practical) and tell them how they should be stored. Review their use periodically and get employee feedback, this can help check that the gloves are performing properly

5.3 Dermatitis

5.3.1 Introduction

Dermatitis is a general term for a group of skin conditions that cause inflammation. It usually affects the hands. It can occur quickly after contact with a strong irritant, or over a longer period from repeated contact with weaker irritants.

Eczema is a type of dermatitis that causes the skin to become dry, itchy, and bumpy. Eczema can also cause redness, swelling, and cracking of the skin.

Though eczema is a type of dermatitis, the terms are often used interchangeably.

Skin irritants can be chemical, biological, mechanical or physical. Repeated and prolonged contact with water (eg more than 20 hand washes or having wet hands for more than 2 hours per shift) can also cause irritant dermatitis.

Someone who has dermatitis may experience symptoms of itching and pain. This can become so bad that the person is unable to continue their work activities.

General signs of dermatitis are:

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

There are 3 main types of dermatitis

- Irritant contact dermatitis
- Allergic contact dermatitis
- Contact urticarial

5.3.2 Reporting of Occupational Dermatitis

Occupational dermatitis is reportable under the **R**eporting of **I**njuries, **D**iseases and **D**angerous **O**ccurrences **R**egulations 2002 (RIDDOR), when it is caused by work (their occupation).

In particular, this includes their skin having been in contact with any chemical with the warning 'may cause sensitisation by skin contact', or 'irritating to the skin'.

A reportable disease must be diagnosed by a doctor. Diagnosis includes the identification of any new symptoms, or any significant worsening of existing symptoms.

Employees must provide the diagnosis in writing to their employer.

5.3.3 Irritant contact dermatitis

Continual wetting and drying of the skin as well as handling irritating substances will dry out the skin. This will occur more rapidly in people with a history of eczema (even as a baby), asthma or hay fever. Irritant contact dermatitis is common in apprentices, junior and casual staff, who often perform a lot of basin work. This condition occurs gradually and builds up over time following long periods of wet work and using shampoo, other hair products and cleaning products.

In the hairdressing and beauty industry, common irritants are:

- Water from washing hands and hair frequently and from handling wet hair
- Wet work
- Shampoo, conditioner and styling products
- Bleach and perming solution
- Soaps and detergents
- Cleaning products
- Not drying hands properly
- Heat and sweating from wearing gloves for long periods of time

5.3.4 Allergic contact dermatitis

Allergy can occur at any time in a hairdresser career and often happens after irritant contact dermatitis has already damaged the skin.

Allergy will cause the skin to be very itchy, flake, split, crack and blister. The skin will flare-up some hours after contact with the particular substance as this type of allergy is delayed, i.e. 4-24 hours after contact. It may take days or weeks to settle down again. It is diagnosed by patch testing at a specialised clinic. Once this condition develops there is no cure. Prevention is the key.

In the Hair industry, common allergens are:

- Hair colours and hair dyes (permanent and semi-permanent)
- Chemical restructuring solution
- Bleach/powder lighteners
- Depilatory waxes (note that people who are allergic to sticking plaster may also be allergic to waxes)

5.3.5 Contact urticaria

This is a different type of allergy and occurs immediately (within 10-30 minutes) of the allergen touching the skin and settles down an hour or two after contact ceases. It is a reaction to specific proteins, leading to hives on the skin, itching and swelling and can also cause a runny nose, sneezing or asthma. Contact urticaria can eventually develop into a life-threatening condition.

Causes of this type of allergy may include:

- Ø Bleach (dust free bleach can lessen the likelihood of developing this type of allergy)
- Ø Natural rubber latex, e.g. cheap, powdered, disposable latex gloves

The following are methods that may be used to assist in the prevention of contact dermatitis.

5.3.6 Health surveillance

Health surveillance is a way to obtain information about employees' health, in order to protect employees from health risks at work.

Health surveillance is appropriate where, for example:

- substances used are known to cause skin sensitisation (allergic contact dermatitis) and/or urticaria in the workplace
- there have been previous cases of work related skin disease, such as dermatitis or urticaria in the workforce/place
- where there is evidence of skin disease in jobs within the industry; eg frequent or prolonged contact with water (termed 'wet-working')
- where there is reliance on PPE, eg gloves as an exposure control measure; there is no guarantee that PPE will be effective at all times

The technique used should not place employees at an increased risk or cause unacceptable harm.

The person to carry out the health surveillance has to be a 'responsible person'.

For more information on health surveillance, [go to HSE's website here](#).

5.3.7 Control measures

Gloves

To prevent work-related contact dermatitis occurring or recurring, it is imperative that hairdressers and beauty therapists use the right sort of gloves for the task being performed. However, it is not uncommon for them to begin to wear gloves only when the skin on their hands is already damaged.

It is important to wear gloves when:

- shampooing
- rinsing out chemicals
- applying colours, chemical restructuring solution and bleach/powder lighteners
- handling wax (if you have a history of problems with sticking plaster)
- cleaning the salon, therapy beds and equipment

Suitable gloves may include:

- disposable vinyl gloves or disposable polyethylene gloves (both suitable for short periods only)
- disposable nitrile gloves (suitable for hairdressing)
- specifically designed hairdressers' gloves are usually reusable and although made of latex they are of a high quality and rarely cause allergy
- reusable rubber or vinyl gloves can be used for cleaning the salon
- avoid using cheap, powdered, disposable latex gloves
- wearing cotton gloves underneath other gloves, or using lined gloves, can be useful to minimise sweating

Information from glove manufacturers may help with deciding which type of glove is the best.

Moisturising

- feed the skin with the moisture it loses during a working day, a barrier repair hand cream with no fragrances is best
- apply moisturising creams during breaks at work, at the end of the day and before bed
- a less greasy moisturising lotion may be easier to use during the day, this is often purchased in a pump-pack
- rub well into the hands and wrists, not forgetting between the fingers
- Points to remember
- Change gloves between clients and at least hourly if still dealing with the same client to reduce sweating
- Disposable gloves must be thrown away after each use, they are not designed to be washed and re-used; this poor work practice allows the chemicals to pass through the glove and onto the skin
- Always keep the contaminated surface of the reusable gloves on the outside, never turn them inside out
- Take rings off at work. Chemicals, detergents, and water can get trapped underneath and may cause dermatitis to develop
- Remember, clients may be allergic to hair dye, perm solution, bleach or latex gloves

Always check with the client if they have any allergies.



5.3.8 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

The Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations 1992 (PPER 1992) as amended by the Personal Protective Equipment at Work (Amendment) Regulations 2022 (PPER 2022) regulations require the provision of appropriate protective clothing and equipment.

In a salon environment, this may include the provision of:

- ✓ Trolleys to move products and minimise spillage
- ✓ Bowls for mixing products
- ✓ Gloves and masks when handling colorants and chemicals, e.g. hydrogen peroxide
- ✓ Plastic gowns and capes to protect the client
- ✓ Training for staff on how to use of equipment
- ✓ Any equipment used should be of an appropriate fit, be well maintained and stored correctly

5.3.9 Resources

For more information, see

Poster: [Skin checks for dermatitis](#) (HSE)

Poster: [How to remove single use gloves](#) (HSE)

Poster: [Reusable, chemically-resistant gloves](#) (HSE)

Poster: [Skin contact - distance your skin from chemicals and wet work](#) (HSE)

Poster: [Skin care - Hand washing and applying hand cream](#) (HSE)

Poster: [Skin care - Method for using hand cream, soap and cleanser](#) (HSE)

INDG233 [Preventing contact dermatitis and urticaria at work](#) (HSE)

INDG330 [Selecting protective gloves for work with chemicals](#) (HSE)

INDG453 [Reporting accidents and incidents at work](#) (HSE)

[L25 Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations 1992 \(as amended\)](#) (HSE)

[Your quick guide to: Allergy to cosmetics](#) (Allergy UK)

[Hairdressing: Julie's story](#) (HSE)

[Hairdressing: Marie's story](#) (HSE)

[Hairdressing: Maxine's story](#) (HSE)