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Toolbox Talk: General

GEN03: Skin Health Surveillance

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What is dermatitis?

Dermatitis is a common occupational* skin disease often caused by repeated skin irritation or sensitisation, symptoms include:

- Skin redness or soreness
- Itching
- Skin rash or inflammation
- Skin cracking or peeling

Dermatitis is easy to detect and can be managed using simple procedures but can be irreversible if left untreated

***Note: Occupational dermatitis is reportable under RIDDOR**



Types of dermatitis

Irritant contact dermatitis

- Can be considered a form of physical damage which can be caused by exposure to contact with irritant or corrosive substances.
- Regular contact with mild irritants or brief contact with strong irritants (or corrosive substances) increases the risk of dermatitis as does prolonged contact with relevant substances.
- Can also be caused by physical conditions e.g. extremes of temperature or sweating caused by prolonged use of gloves (including nitrile gloves).
- The risk of irritant dermatitis is increased in individuals who have atopic eczema or other skin conditions

Allergic contact dermatitis

- Many substances can act as sensitisers meaning that the body develops an allergy to them after one or more exposures. In many cases there will be no immediate evidence that an individual has been affected.
- Once an individual has become sensitised it is likely that they will remain so permanently, even a very minor exposure can then lead to a severe immune response causing the skin to become red and itchy.



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What can cause dermatitis at work?

Dermatitis at work is often caused by exposure to certain substances or conditions for example:

- Wet work / regular hand washing (especially using soap or detergent)
- Epoxy resins
- Metalworking / cutting fluids
- Latex (including latex gloves) and other rubber compounds
- Exposure to solvents, irritant and corrosive chemicals
- Regular use of gloves (including vinyl and nitrile gloves)
- Chemicals that are irritants or skin sensitisers

Regular exposure will increase the likelihood of dermatitis which may depend on the sensitivity of the individual.



Reducing the risk (Avoid, Protect, Check)

Avoid contact with materials that cause dermatitis where possible

- Substitute hazardous substances with safer alternatives
- Keep a safe working distance
- Automate or enclose processes

Protect the skin

- Provide appropriate protective clothing / gloves
- Contamination should be washed from skin as quickly as possible
- Hands should always be fully dried after washing
- Consider providing moisturising pre-work and after work creams

Check for early signs of dermatitis

- Regular skin checks should be used where the risk cannot be fully eliminated by avoidance / protection
- Health surveillance should be provided where required

Skin health surveillance

Health surveillance should be considered for individuals who are at risk of developing occupational dermatitis, consider the following:

- Are individuals working with substances listed previously or ones assigned the risk code R43?
- Are individuals carrying out tasks likely to lead to dermatitis (e.g. wet workers or glove users)?
- Assessment of new workers deemed at risk should be carried out within 6 weeks of starting
- Regular skin checks should be carried out by individuals on an ongoing basis
 - **Weekly checks are recommended**
 - **Checks should be recorded to provide confirmation they are taking place**
- Any symptoms that are identified should be reported to the line manager / PI in the first instance
- Consider carrying out a health surveillance risk assessment for any process which could cause dermatitis

***Health surveillance is not an alternative to proper exposure control**

How to carry out skin checks

Talk to staff in your area and ask the following questions:

- Ask the employee if they are having problems with their skin (itching, dryness, redness, cracking, weeping, scaling)
- Ask what they are doing to protect their skin
- Encourage avoidance of contact with substances and use of the correct PPE
- Encourage them to tell you if problems start before their next check is due

What actions to take if a problem is identified*:

- Remind the employee to:
 - **Avoid contact with water and chemicals**
 - **Keep their hands dry**
 - **Use PPE as instructed**

***Don't try to diagnose the cause yourself, refer to the occupational health unit**



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<https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/seps/az/healthsurveillance/>

<https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/occupationalhealthunit/>

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