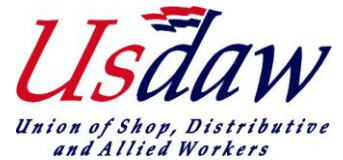




Work-related Skin Disease



Work-related skin disease is a common problem. According to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) there are around 16,000 cases every year. Three quarters of these are dermatitis. The main causes are exposure to detergents and soaps and wet work so Usdaw members in cleaning, catering or food manufacture may be at increased risk.

Dermatitis is inflammation of the skin. Symptoms include swelling, itching, flaking or cracking of the skin, blisters and weeping sores. It can be caused by irritation or by an allergic reaction. It is not contagious but once a person has dermatitis they may develop infections as a result of germs getting inside the cracked or broken skin.

Irritant contact dermatitis can affect anyone if they are exposed to physical, chemical or biological agents that irritate the skin. Examples include wet work, detergents and disinfectants, solvents, some food products and photo-processing chemicals. Repeated or prolonged exposure to water (wet work) is a major cause of irritant dermatitis. Workers who have to wash their hands more than 20 times a day or who spend more than 2 hours a day with their hands in water are at high risk of dermatitis.

Allergic contact dermatitis is much less common. It happens when an individual becomes sensitised to a substance. Once the allergy has developed exposure to small amounts can trigger a reaction. Substances that can cause allergic dermatitis include some foods, flowers and plants, adhesives and some drugs. Even the nickel that is found in coins can affect some shop workers.

OCCUPATION	EXAMPLES OF IRRITANTS	EXAMPLES OF SENSITISERS
Bakers	Acids, detergents, wet work	Ammonium persulphate, benzoyl peroxide, food dyes, essential oils, enzymes, flavours, flour, lemon, lime, orange
Bartenders	Detergents, disinfectants, scale-removers, wet work	Formaldehyde, lemon, lime, orange
Beauticians (nail bars)	Wet work, cosmetics	Epoxy and acrylic resins, latex rubber proteins
Butchers, abattoir workers	Acids, alkalis, detergents, meat, waste products, wet work	Animal proteins, formaldehyde, latex rubber protein, nickel, sawdust
Cooks, caterers	Acids, alkalis, bleaching agents, detergents, vegetable juices, wet work	Flavours, formaldehyde, garlic, onions, sodium metabisulphite, spices, hardwood cutting boards
Wood workers	Detergents, glues, solvents, thinners, wood dust, wood preservatives	Colophony, dyes, fungicides, glues, turpentine, varnishes, woods
Florists	Compost, fertilisers, pesticides, wet work	Plants, pesticides
Hairdressers	Bleaching agents, dyes, permanent wave solutions, shampoos, wet work	Dyes, nickel, persulphates, perfumes, latex rubber protein, glyceryl thioglycolate, para-phenylenediamine (PPD), formaldehyde.

Gloves may not protect.

Gloves are often issued where wet work is being done or where there are substances that can cause dermatitis. However gloves can have their own problems.

Latex gloves contain proteins that can cause an allergic reaction. For sensitised individuals latex allergy can be very serious.

Even plastic or nitrile gloves can cause problems. Because they are designed to be impermeable, they can trap sweat and any contaminant that gets inside the glove. This can cause irritation even though the gloves are worn to provide protection. If gloves do have to be worn, latex gloves should be avoided. The right type of gloves should be provided. Glove breaks or the use of cotton liners can reduce irritation from sweat inside the gloves. Workers should be trained on safe use and removal of gloves to reduce contamination.

Its as simple as APC

According to the HSE the best approach to manage the risk of skin disease is [Avoid Protect Check](#).

Where possible, **avoid** contact with the agent that can cause damage. There are a range options that might prevent or reduce contact:

- substituting chemicals with safer alternatives
- enclosing processes
- using tools with longer handles
- changing working practices.

Where **protection** is needed:

- makes sure that gloves work
- give workers glove breaks
- provide mild soap, hot and cold water and soft towels
- if hand sanitisers are used, provide ones with added moisturiser
- provide moisturisers and encourage workers to use them

Checking won't prevent skin disease but early treatment can prevent more serious damage. Where there is a risk of dermatitis, checking for early signs of dryness, redness or irritation is important.

HSE has lots of resources and advice on the prevention of work-related skin disease - <http://www.hse.gov.uk/skin/index.htm>

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