

## PREVENTION OF OCCUPATIONAL SKIN DISEASE



The skin rash you see in these pictures is preventable. Contact dermatitis is the most common form of occupational skin disease and can happen in any workplace, but there are certain high-risk jobs. If you come into contact with a substance at work such as a chemical (for example, Varsol), car or metal fluids, detergents, paints, beauty products, resins or water, you may be at higher risk. Skin problems can be painful for a worker and can leave a person weakened, interfering with activities at home and work. It can also be costly for an employer in lost time and productivity. Let's go over some simple and cost-effective steps employers and workers can take to avoid occupational skin disease.

**Create a Healthy and Safe Workplace** Employers are required to assess the risks, and develop policies and programs to prevent occupational skin disease. By following WHMIS, and making sure Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) are readily available you'll reduce the risk. You can also assess if there are risks in your workplace by simply watching people work. By watching, you'll see if skin comes into contact with an irritant and then be able to change a process, substitute a substance, or use additional personal protective equipment.



**Manage Risk** Both the worker and employer can manage skin exposure risks. Look to see if a chemical can be substituted or a process changed to reduce the risk of exposure. Make sure you're working at a safe distance. Distancing your skin from chemicals will lower the chance of risk. Wear proper fitting gloves and protective clothing. Wearing protective gloves may prevent occupational skin disease, but if a glove becomes dirty inside, it can be the cause of irritation. Make sure to replace your gloves regularly. The most common areas to be affected by dermatitis are the hands and face but any unprotected area of skin risks exposure through contaminated clothes, tools, or work surfaces.

**Good Skin Care** There are many products designed to help your skin. Pre-work creams can help skin retain its protective strength. Proper skin cleansers will moisturize the skin. Avoid very abrasive products as your skin may become further damaged. Moisturize your skin ideally every time you wash and dry your hands. Check your skin regularly for any signs of itching, pain, redness, swelling, small blisters and flaking scaly skin. Have a doctor check your hands if you have any signs of skin disease. A doctor will determine if it is irritant dermatitis, which is the most common form of the contact dermatitis or if it is an allergic reaction.



**Who to Talk to** Employers should talk to their workers about skin hazards. If you think you might have occupational skin disease, talk to your doctor.

**Want to Know More** See the fact sheet on how to recognize occupational skin disease. You can also visit the Workplace Safety & Prevention website for additional information and resources.

**Flip this sheet over for more images and facts.**

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- A skin hazard may be a substance used or generated in the workplace.
- If you are concerned about skin hazards, ask your employer to assess your workplace
- Your workplace may be able to change substances or the way processes are done to reduce exposure risks.
- Check for early signs of occupational skin disease. Early diagnosis and advice is important.
- Symptoms include dry cracking skin, blisters, itching, burning or pain, and mild swelling.
- If you develop a skin rash that may be related to work, tell your employer and go to your doctor.
- Make sure to follow written instructions for safe handling of any substance.
- Wear gloves that are clean, comfortable, fit right, and are appropriate for the task.
- Immediately wash skin that comes into contact with irritants with large amounts of warm clean water and a mild moisturizing soap.
- Use appropriate creams and hand moisturizers.
- Never wash your hands with solvents such as Varsol or gasoline.
- Try to avoid industrial cleaners with pumice as these can sometimes make things worse.
- If you do 'wet work,' you're at a higher risk for occupational skin disease. 'Wet work' is the term used when you frequently have your hands in water.
- It's a good idea to avoid wearing rings at work if you're doing a 'wet work' type of job. Water and soap tend to collect under rings.

Flip this sheet over for more information.