



Protecting your skin at work

Learning Objectives

- Understand how skin can be affected at work
- Understand the signs and symptoms of skin problems & how to report them
- Understand how to prevent skin problems

Key Points

1. Understanding How Skin Can Be Affected at Work

Skin problems at work can be caused by:

- Chemicals – most common reason
- Water – having wet hands for a long period of time
- Bacteria in the environment
- Rubbing
- Extreme temperatures
- Sun exposure

Ask your team: What types of products do you use at work that might affect your skin?

Examples:

- Paints
- Solvents
- Oils
- Hair products
- Detergents & cleaning products
- Epoxy resins
- Cement
- Some foods

- Skin problems can sometimes take a long time to get better because the lower layers of the skin are damaged and need to heal before the outer layers improve.
- Most work-related skin problems are not contagious but can feel and look painful.

2. Understand the Signs and Symptoms of Skin Problems

Signs and symptoms include (example photos included on last two pages):

- Dryness
- Itching
- Redness
- Swelling
- Blistering
- Cracking
- Flaking
- Bleeding

If you notice any of these symptoms, it's important to report it to: [Andrew Price or Nathalie Martens](#) at the earliest opportunity – don't wait until it gets really bad.

Reporting it means you can get advice about what to do about it, and steps can be taken to help the problem get better and prevent it happening again.

You might be referred to occupational health or to your GP.

3. Understand How to Prevent Skin Problems

Both you and your employer have a part to play in preventing skin problems from developing.

Let's talk about you first –

- Choosing products that are least harmful to your skin
- Planning work to minimise your exposure
- Providing appropriate PPE such as gloves and overalls to protect your skin
- Giving you information about how to protect your skin
- Providing regular skin checks or 'health surveillance' to monitor symptoms

Now we'll talk about what you can do to prevent skin problems.

Ask the team: Does anyone have any ideas about what you could do to protect yourself:

- Wear PPE provided
- Take care to avoid skin coming directly into contact with products
- Make sure gloves fit well and are in good condition
- Fold the end of disposable gloves over if doing wet work to catch drips
- Avoid wearing sharp jewellery or having sharp nails when wearing disposable gloves
- Wash hands thoroughly after handling products
- Use any barrier creams and after-work creams provided
- Keep overalls clean
- Take care when removing gloves and other PPE
- Check your own skin regularly and report any symptoms
- Take same precautions at home



Show video of how to remove gloves safely here if appropriate – video can be downloaded here: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/skin/videos/gloves/index.htm>. This video shows how the correct removal of gloves can protect the skin from coming into contact with a product, and how incorrect removal could lead to skin problems

Remember to wash hands properly – use only one or two pumps of soaps and rub it on all areas of the hands and wrists for about 20 seconds before rinsing.

Always use soap and water instead of hand sanitiser if possible.

Important to re-hydrate hands using moisturisers / creams provided.



4. In Summary

Skin problems can be prevented by taking appropriate care.

Both employers and employees have a responsibility to keep workers safe by reducing exposure, following procedures and control measures (such as wearing PPE and handwashing), and properly monitoring skin.

Catching problems early and reporting them is important for your health and to make sure appropriate action can be taken to stop it happening again or happening to other people.

Examples of Skin Problems

More pictures and skin at work resources available at: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/skin/information.htm>

