

Occupational Health Service



Hand Care - Helpful Hints

Hand hygiene and caring for your hands has never been so important.

Infection prevention and control measures, such as handwashing, alcohol gel and glove use can all cause or worsen dermatitis, the main work-related dry skin condition.

Follow these simple steps to prevent and manage skin problems:

- Ensure you use a good hand hygiene and drying technique in adherence to the local policy for your work area.
- *Avoid* direct contact between unprotected hands and hazardous substances e.g. substances/products used directly in work activities, biological agents.
- Wash hands with soap and water, or use alcohol-based hand rub if hand washing facilities are not available
- Always wet hands thoroughly before applying soap.
- Wash hands with soap and water (for at least 20 seconds) when visibly dirty, obviously soiled or if hands have been in contact with communal surfaces, and after bathroom visits etc.
- Ensure that you rinse and dry thoroughly.
- Regularly apply hand moisturising creams, also known as 'emollients' or skin conditioners. Their purpose is to help replace moisture and temporarily restore the barrier effect of the skin; they should be applied at *least* once a day, preferably more frequently, and ideally each time the hands are washed and dried.
- *Check* skin regularly for the first signs of irritant contact dermatitis: itchy, dry or red skin.

Glove use

- Wearing gloves is *not* an alternative to carrying out effective hand hygiene procedures.
- Hands can sweat inside gloves, making the skin over-hydrated (which can lead to dermatitis) and the gloves uncomfortable to wear.
- Remember to take 'glove breaks'. Removing gloves for a minute or so before hands get too hot and sweaty, can help 'air' the hands. If this is not possible, consider the use of separate cotton gloves to wear under protective gloves to help absorb sweat. They may be laundered and reused.

Report any skin issue with your hands to your manager and seek help and advice from local Health and Safety, Occupational Health and or your GP at the earliest opportunity.

Further University information

<https://health-safety.ed.ac.uk/occupational-health/services/health-surveillance/skin-surveillance>

References:

Health and Safety Executive (2015) Managing skin exposure risks at work: [Managing skin exposure risks at work HSG262 \(hse.gov.uk\)](https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/hsg262.pdf)