

Did you know?

Skin problems at work

Work-related, or occupational, skin problems are very common in the construction industry. They can be caused – or existing problems made worse – by carrying out certain tasks, having wet hands for much of the day, or by contact with particular substances including:

- *Wet cement*
- *Epoxy resins and hardeners*
- *Acrylic sealants*
- *Bitumen or asphalt*
- *Solvents used in paints, glues or other surface coatings*
- *Petrol, diesel, oils and greases*
- *Degreasers, descalers and detergents*

What are the hazards and risks with dermatitis?

Contact dermatitis is an inflammation of the skin caused by contact with certain materials. It is most common on the hands but can affect all parts of the body.

There are three main types of contact dermatitis:

- ***Irritant contact dermatitis*** – which is caused by things that cause the skin to dry out, causing damage
- ***Allergic contact dermatitis*** – this happens when someone becomes allergic to something that has come into contact with their skin; it can show hours or even days after contact
- ***Contact urticaria*** – this is a different type of allergy, occurring within minutes of touching certain things before disappearing again within hours

What should my employer be doing?

[The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health 2002 \(COSHH\)](http://www.hse.gov.uk/coshh/basics.htm) Act was introduced to prevent or reduce workers' exposure to hazardous substances, including those that affect the skin. You can find out more about this at: www.hse.gov.uk/coshh/basics.htm.

Your employer must make sure that your health is protected by identifying the hazards, assessing the risk and where possible avoiding contact or exposure to these substances or chemicals. If exposure, or contact, can't be avoided then your employer needs to carry out a risk assessment.

Once your employer has carried out a risk assessment then they must make sure that:

- *Control measures are used, for example*
 - *Safe system of work are put in place and adhered to*
 - *Correct personal protection equipment (PPE) is available*
- *Washing facilities with hot/warm and cold running water is provided so that hands, forearms, or any other exposed skin, can be washed*
- *You are provided with relevant information and training on skin problems and its risks to your health*

Health surveillance (regular health checks) are carried out if necessary

What health checks should I have?

Carrying out health checks, or surveillance, is important in detecting early signs of damage. You may be given a questionnaire to fill in or asked some simple questions, followed by a health check to look for any symptoms; for example redness, itching, scaling, swelling, blistering, flaking and cracking. If you have any symptoms of dermatitis then you may need to have further checks or assessments.

What can I do to reduce the risk from dermatitis?

There are some simple steps you can take to reduce the risk of dermatitis:

- *Avoid contact with materials that are known to cause dermatitis*
- *Protect your skin*
 - *Wash and dry your hands properly using the correct soap/cleaner*
 - *Use the pre- and after-work creams*
- *Check your skin for early signs of dermatitis*

What are the symptoms and what do I need to do?

The signs of dermatitis are pretty much the same regardless of which type you have. They usually start with:

- *Dry, red and itchy skin; then*
- *Swelling, flaking, blistering, cracking and pain can follow*

Being able to identify any signs of dermatitis at an early stage is important. Making early adjustments can prevent the condition from getting any worse.

If you think you may have dermatitis you should speak to your manager, the occupational health practitioner or your GP as soon as possible.

For general advice you can contact CBH on 0845 873 7726

Useful links

HSE website at: www.hse.gov.uk/skin/

www.hse.gov.uk/construction/healthtopics/dermatitis.htm

CBH website at: www.cbhscheme.com

Fit for Work website at: fitforwork.org