

## DERMATITIS

**Purpose: A brief guide on what you need to know about dermatitis.**

### What is Dermatitis?

A very general term meaning inflammation of the skin from any cause. Dermatitis, or eczema, is not a specific disease, but any one of a considerable range of disorders in which the skin is inflamed. The appearance of many of these conditions is similar and may range in severity, with redness, blister formation, swelling, weeping and crusting.

There is itching and burning and a strong impulse to scratch, which often makes the condition worse and may, in itself, keep it going. Different kinds of dermatitis may have a similar appearance, but the causes may be very diverse.

### Possible Causes

Because the skin is the largest organ in the body and the most accessible to contact or injury, many cases of dermatitis are due to direct injury. This may be infective, from viruses, bacteria or fungi. It may be caused by tiny insects, such as the scabies mite, or lice or it may result from chemical injury by irritants, solvents, detergents, defatting agents, and generally toxic substances.

For the same reason, many are due to actual allergy in which hypersensitivity has developed to a particular substance that would not normally have any adverse effect. Allergic inflammation may occur from contact with metals, plants, cosmetics, drugs, foodstuffs or a wide range of chemical substances. Eczema, or atopic dermatitis, has a familial tendency and is commonly associated with hay fever and asthma.

### The Law

The Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations 1992 state what both employers and employees have to do.

The main requirements are:

- Provide suitable personal protective equipment.
- Control the risk where practical.
- Provide information and training.

### Remember:

- There is no better substitute than to follow the safety procedures and wear the appropriate PPE.
- Like hearing protection, PPE only starts to work once

you put it on but stops working the instant you take it off. However, it will decline with use and you should change it whenever necessary. You should endeavour to change your gloves at least once a day, sooner if the particular glove type/substance demands it.

### Treatment

The treatment of the various forms of dermatitis is often a job for an expert dermatologist who will often have to take a wide view of the problem and may find that the solution rests in the management of some general (systemic) disorder not obviously connected with the skin.

### But:

- Unless all the options are looked at, a cure may not be available.
- If you have reached this stage, it could already be too late.

**PREVENTION IS ALWAYS THE BETTER OPTION THAN A CURE. GET IT RIGHT TO START WITH.**

### Look after your skin

*Good personal hygiene is essential.*

- ALWAYS wear PPE, especially suitable gloves to protect you from the substance. Try to change your gloves at least at the end of every shift; more often if necessary.
- Comply with a strict regime of washing your hands and forearms. Use the appropriate hand cleansers, and if necessary, apply a barrier cream. However do not expect a barrier cream to protect you, wear gloves as well.

### Instructions

- ALWAYS apply a moisturiser to your hands to top up the level of natural oils.
- NEVER use solvents, bleaches or other non-proprietary substances to clean your hands. Not only will they affect your skin, they can quickly be absorbed into the system and affect other organs.

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### What you should do

You should regularly check for any rashes, soreness, inflammation or swelling. If you find any to which you cannot apply a reasonable cause, you must report it to your supervisor and make an appointment to see your doctor.

- Your company will need you to list all those substances in which you come into daily contact at work. This is so that your company can determine if there is any new substance causing the problem.
- If you have not come into contact with any new substances, it may mean that you have become sensitised to a substance that you have been using for some time.
- Your doctor may refer you to a specialist. He may also need to know what substances you have been in contact with. It is only by very closely monitoring what has changed that the root cause can be determined.

*Remember: even if you have carried out a task for many years with no ill effect, the skin will only take so much before it reacts. Once it does, you will always be allergic to it.*

**Important Notice:** Your Health & Safety Information Sheet is for guidance only. It does not replace our written Health & Safety policies and procedures and you must make sure you are fully aware of these.

**Training Courses:** For more details on our Health & Safety Training courses available, please contact our learning Zone department via email: [learningzone@shrec.org.uk](mailto:learningzone@shrec.org.uk) or visit our website: [www.shrec.org.uk](http://www.shrec.org.uk)