

### Hand barrier/moisturiser cream.

Barrier creams protect the skin from harmful chemicals but have no moisturising effect. Moisturising cream hydrates the skin and maintains the skin barrier. The cream provided at work has a barrier and moisturising effect. It is also non perfumed. Perfume moisturiser can cause allergic reactions. Perfume moisturiser is not advised when working with food.

### How and when to apply hand moisturiser.

Before applying moisturiser ensure hands are appropriately cleaned and thoroughly dried. As a guide the hand cream provided should be applied three times during an eight hour shift at the beginning mid and end. More repeated applications may be necessary if you have dry skin. Appropriately cover all hand areas to include the back of the hand, fingers and inter digital spaces. This will help restore the damaged outer layer and soothes the skin.

- Apply and massage thoroughly into the skin ensuring all areas are protected including the cuticles and fingernails.
- Allow to dry for two minutes.
- 4 hours protection is given even with repeated washing
- When at home establish a hand care moisturising routine using a non perfumed moisturiser.

### So Remember

Take good care of your hands and treat them well as they are essential to your occupation.

Prevention is better than cure so establish a hand care moisturising routine to apply at work and at home.

Report early any skin rashes or problems to your Occupational Health Department where the condition will be assessed, treated and appropriate advice will be given to you.

*For appointment, advice or queries, please contact:*

**Occupational Health Department,**  
Cork University Hospital.  
Tel : 021- 4922018/9.

**Occupational Health Department,**  
Kerry General Hospital.  
Tel : 066 – 7184432.

# Hand Care For Health Care Staff



## Caring for your skin at work.

### Why is hand care important?

In the health care setting maintaining healthy skin of the hands is of paramount importance in the prevention of infection and dermatitis. Damaged skin is associated with an increased number and composition of bacterial flora. There is also an occupational risk to healthcare staff of acquiring blood borne viruses of Hepatitis B, C or HIV if the skin is cracked or abraded. Many people take their skin for granted until a skin problem arises. Spending a little time each day looking after your skin can help to keep it in good condition.

### What is Occupational Dermatitis?

Dermatitis is inflammation of the skin caused by exposure to any substance including water that is used in the work place. There are two types of occupational dermatitis.

**Irritant Contact Dermatitis** : occurs when substances irritate the skin causing damage. Repeated exposure to water, cosmetics, mild soaps, detergents, solvents and cement are some examples.

**Allergic Contact Dermatitis** : is caused by an allergic reaction or sensitisation to the offending substance or allergen. The immune system is triggered to over react. Reactions may occur in parts of the body where contact was not made. Examples of common allergens are rubber, nickel, formaldehyde, fragrances, plants and hairdressing chemicals.

In some cases occupational dermatitis may require the person to change their work methods or occupation.

### What are the early signs of dermatitis?

Dermatitis can develop after the first contact, or appear after many years of exposure. It can take months for the skin to recover to its normal healthy state.

Early signs include dryness, redness and itching. In severe cases the skin may become swollen with a nettle rash type presentation or vesicles where crusting may develop. The skin may eventually become cracked, thickened and scaly if left untreated.

### Prevention of dermatitis.

Occupational health experts recommend the use of moisturising creams to prevent and treat established skin problems and dry skin. The application of moisturising hand creams is of particular importance in the healthcare setting where the main risks are exposure to repeated wet work. Frequent hand washing causes the removal of the natural oils from the skin which act as a protective barrier. When the barrier is removed skin irritation is likely to occur.

### Hand care tips to prevent skin problems.

- Use warm water not hot to wash the hands.
- Remove rings prior to hand washing.
- Wet the hands prior to applying soap/liquid soap, thoroughly lathering all surfaces.
- Carefully rinse soap residues from hands.
- Pat the hands gently and dry thoroughly.
- Have a dedicated moisturizing hand care routine regimen at work and at home.
- Wear gloves in cold and windy weather.

### Glove use.

If prolonged glove use is necessary they should be changed at intervals, hands should be washed and dried carefully and new gloves donned. Using moisturising cream applications before prolonged glove use can reduce skin problems.

- Assess the task and decide are gloves required.
- Use the appropriate glove for the task. Remember different types of gloves may be required for different tasks, e.g. vinyl for food handling.
- Ensure the glove size is correct for you.
- Wash and dry hands before putting on and after taking off gloves. Take care to dry thoroughly behind rings.
- Wear gloves for all wet work, especially when in contact with washing up liquid and detergents.
- If water enters a glove remove it immediately.
- Do not use damaged gloves.
- Oil based moisturisers must not be applied if wearing latex gloves as they are not compatible.

### If you have skin problems you will need to take these extra precautions.

- You can wear cotton gloves inside or use cotton lined gloves.
- Wear gloves when shampooing your hair. Shampoo can be harsh to the skin of your hands as it removes the protective natural oils.
- Avoid bare hand contact with polish and solvents, for example, metal, wax, shoe, floor, car furniture polish and solvents such as white spirit, petrol, paraffin, turpentine and thinners.
- Use a soap substitute such as emulsifying ointment or aqueous cream.
- Avoid bare hand contact with citrus fruits, hair lotion and hair dye products.
- If your hands are dirty use a non perfumed soap sparingly and rinse the hands thoroughly.
- Remember to moisturise the hands regularly.