



25.1 Occupational Dermatitis: A Guide for Exposed Employees

Introduction

Occupational Dermatitis is an inflammation of the skin caused by irritating or sensitising substances at work. The symptoms include:

- Red flaky skin.
- Weeping from cracked skin or blisters.
- Itching and irritation.
- Sores, which may become infected.



What causes Occupational Dermatitis?

There are many substances known to cause dermatitis, which fall into **2** categories:

Primary Irritants Sensitisers

Causing **Irritant** Contact Dermatitis, where contaminated skin becomes inflamed if a substance is in contact with the skin for sufficient time.

Causing **Allergic** Contact Dermatitis, they affect only a small portion of workers that are exposed. Once a person has become **sensitised** to the substance, they will probably remain so.

It is nearly impossible to tell which type of dermatitis is present just by observing the affected area as they look almost identical.

Prevention

It is easier to prevent dermatitis than to cure it. The basic aim of prevention is to eliminate contact between the irritant or sensitiser and the skin using a variety of methods.



Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Considered a “last resort” control, this equipment might include overalls, aprons, gloves, footwear, leggings and faceguards of various kinds.

Employees should wash contaminated skin immediately and ensure that the affected areas are clean

Personal Hygiene

and dry afterwards.



Care of Skin

Liquid soap should be used, except where the skin is heavily contaminated. The use of **conditioning (after work) creams**, after washing, is also an excellent way of maintaining healthy skin.

Health Surveillance

Companies should arrange for regular skin checks to be undertaken by either a designated & competent person either from the business, or by an Occupational Health professional. Employees are legally obliged to comply with such programmes where deemed necessary by the company’s risk assessment.



Further Information

Specific information about work related skin disease can be found at: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/skin/>. A copy of this & other documentation can be found from <https://mohs.co.uk/resources> or using the QR code at the top of this page.