



IT'S IN YOUR HANDS®

Prevent work related skin disease

Whether you are an employer or an employee,
do not become a victim of work-related skin disease.

Work-related skin disease can cause serious problems. Many people live with pain and discomfort because of it and have had to give up work. It also results in millions of pounds being paid out to victims in compensation. However, by taking a sensible, positive approach to looking after health & safety, you could prevent work related skin disease and the associated problems in your workplace.

IT'S IN YOUR HANDS®

The Original Campaign

The IT'S IN YOUR HANDS® campaign was launched by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), the British Safety Industry Federation (BSIF), Safety Groups UK (SG UK), the British Occupational Hygiene Society (BOHS), the Institute of Occupational Medicine (IOM) and the TUC in 2006.

The campaign aimed to promote improved skin care in industrial and commercial organisations. The objective of the campaign was to significantly reduce the incidence of work-related dermatitis. The campaign was successful and HSE statistics show that the incidence of work-related dermatitis is reducing. This document was the main vehicle for the campaign and has been widely used throughout the UK.

2026 update

This document has been updated and expanded because:

- The majority of work-related skin disease cases are preventable by adopting simple steps to manage risks in the workplace; effective skin care is an important part of any regime, along with applying simple exposure reduction methods.

Skin Disease at Work

Who is most at risk of skin disease at work?

If you answer 'yes' to any of the following, you may have a higher risk of incidence of work-related skin disease.

- Are chemicals / substances used in your workplace which contain warning signs (irritant / corrosive / harmful / toxic / very toxic) and are there risk / safety phrases on the product / packaging?
- Do workers' hands come into frequent contact with hazardous substances (e.g. adhesives, paints, inks, solvents, dyes, shampoo) on a daily basis?
- Do workers' hands come into contact with mineral oil-based substances, such as engine and machine oils, lubricants, some cutting fluids and greases?
- Do workers' hands come into prolonged or repeated contact with water due to the work they do (e.g. more than 2 hours per day or more than 20 times a day)? This is known as 'wet working'.
- Do workers' hands come into frequent contact with plants, flowers, or animal products?
- Do workers come into contact with other natural substances (e.g. food ingredients, wood dust and latex)?
- Are workers exposed to risk of skin abrasion?
- Are workers exposed to the sun during their working day?
- Do workers have a pre-existing skin condition, including allergies?
- Are workers exposed to cold conditions (e.g. outdoors in winter/cold storage)?

Skin contact

The ways in which skin comes into contact with chemical agents are:

- Direct contact with substances, splashes and touching
- Contaminated surfaces (e.g. work surfaces, tools, coveralls and gloves)
- Airborne substances can deposit on the skin

The hands, the face and other areas in direct contact with these agents are at risk. Covered areas may also be affected: in particular, workers should never keep contaminated cloths in their pockets and should always wash dirty hands prior to, as well as after, going to the toilet.



Allergic Contact Dermatitis



Irritant Contact Dermatitis

Work Related Dermatitis

What Causes Dermatitis?

Work-related dermatitis can be caused by exposure to chemical agents and wet work (this means having hands repeatedly wet for long periods during the working day). Other agents causing work-related dermatitis can be biological (e.g. plants and/or bacteria), physical (e.g. vibration and/or radiation) and mechanical (e.g. abrasion). Dermatitis accounts for over 70% of work-related skin disease. Hands are most at risk but other parts of the body can be affected.

How Do I Recognise Dermatitis?

Check for any of the following symptoms:

- Redness/swelling of hands/fingers
- Cracking of skin on hands/fingers
- Blisters on hands/fingers
- Flaking/scaling of skin
- Itching of hands/fingers with cracks
- Has anyone suffered from the symptoms above more than once in the last twelve months?
- Did anyone then say that their skin got better or the problems went away when they had periods off work?

A medical diagnosis and confirmation of work-related dermatitis will require an assessment by a medical professional. Trained safety representatives or supervisors can provide a useful role in early detection of work-related dermatitis and its control.

Your Legal Obligations

The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health [COSHH] Regulations require employers to identify the hazards associated with substances in the workplace, such as chemical agents, and assess the extent of likely exposure when these substances are used. Based on these assessments, they must then determine the health risks. Once a judgement of the risks has been evaluated, controls to minimise these must be put in place. The law is clear. Until this has been done, employees may not work with substances hazardous to health.

The management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations requires employers to conduct risk assessments and introduce appropriate procedures to remove or minimise the identified risks.

Workplace (Health, Safety & Welfare) Regulations require employers to provide suitable washing facilities.

Employers must consult employees and their representatives on health and safety matters including when prevention of dermal exposure is not reasonably practicable. Employees must co-operate with the employer to meet the legal obligations.

What Are Hazardous Substances?

In this context, these are substances (and wet work) capable of causing damage to the skin and can be divided into four groups:

- Those that cause irritation to the skin, leading to irritant contact dermatitis
- Those that sensitise the skin causing allergic contact dermatitis
- Those that cause other skin diseases such as skin cancer and skin discolouration (depigmentation)
- Those that cause other effects such as burns

Many substances can penetrate the skin and are capable of causing diseases elsewhere in the body. While harmful substances and wet work are a major cause of skin disease, constantly working in uncomfortably hot or cold surroundings or excessively dry or wet conditions can also cause serious skin disorders.

Health Risks at Work

Every organisation, large or small, is invited to become involved in the Health Risks at Work initiative, to identify and manage the common risks to health associated with work activities. *Initiated by Safety Groups (SCoS), HSE, NHS Scotland (SCHWL) and RoSPA in 2009, the campaign continues to be rolled out across the UK, led by Safety Groups UK, supported by BSIF.*

Why focus on Health Risks at Work?

Health Risks at Work aims to raise awareness of major occupational health issues. Recent statistics show that there are around 130 - 140 fatalities a year in the workplace (excluding deaths on the road), in comparison to 12000 health related deaths.

Work activities undertaken and the conditions and substances to which workers are exposed can cause long-term harm to our health. Risks to health can be managed and ill health prevented if every business takes some simple steps to identify sources of harm and to put in place measures to manage them.

Health Risks at Work has identified skin as one of five key health risks at work.

For more information on Health Risks at work visit:

www.safetysgroupsuk.org.uk/campaigns/hraw/

www.safetysgroupsuk.org.uk/media/1015/rapid-reference-cards-skinpdf.pdf

www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/

www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/assets/docs/hssh2425.pdf

How Do I recognise Hazardous Substances?

As a requirement of CLP (Classification, Labelling and Packaging Regulation), suppliers are required by law to identify the hazards of the chemicals and products they provide via labelling of packs and provision of a Safety Data Sheet to professional users.

The warning signs and risk/safety phrases (hazards and precautionary statements) on the container and the safety data sheet will help you to identify chemicals that can cause harm to the skin. Before using a chemical, always read the label on the container and consult the safety data sheet.

Consumer products, such as those used for hairdressing, are unlikely to carry R-phrases or warning signs but may still be hazardous. If in doubt, contact your supplier.



Safe Working Distance (SWD)

Safe Working Distance is an essential approach to reduce dermal exposure in the workplace.



Preventing Dermatitis In The Workplace

Control Measures

There is a legal duty to prevent work-related dermatitis by minimising skin contact with hazardous substances. This must be done by establishing a safe system of work, including safe handling methods, training and instruction of employees to help them carry out their work safely, providing suitable personal protective equipment [PPE] and skin cleansers and creams together with adequate washing facilities. In some cases, it may also make sense to carry out regular skin checks to identify cases of dermatitis and ensure that these controls are working.

DO NOT

- Immerse hands in chemicals or allow prolonged or repeated contact with water.
- Work so as to cause chemical splashes on the skin.
- Allow skin to come into contact with contaminated work-pieces, surfaces, tools, clothing, etc.

DO

- Know the health risks associated with chemicals and products used in the workplace. Ensure the labels on the container are legible and are read and understood.
- Use tools and methods which will prevent skin contact with hazardous substances.
- Use suitable protective gloves where necessary.
- Ensure that hands are washed and dried regularly, including before donning and after removing protective gloves.
- Use pre and after-work creams to ensure good skin condition. Remember, pre-work creams are not a replacement for protective gloves.
- Seek medical advice if there are concerns about the condition of the skin.

On average, a reported case of dermatitis costs an employer £6000.

Diepgen TT.L. et al; Contact Dermatitis 2013; 69-88-106.

Safe Working Distance (SWD)

SWD is an essential approach to reduce dermal exposure in the workplace. In many instances, when hands are being used as tools, they are frequently immersed in chemicals and/or water. This means there is no SWD. However, SWD between the hands and hazardous substances can be achieved in many ways. Look at the practicability and implement the principle described, in order, below:

Avoid Skin Contact

1. Try to eliminate the use of a hazardous substance or wet working (e.g. by using an alternative process).
2. Use less harmful substances (e.g. substitution).
3. Control the exposure by use of engineering controls such as automated handling, complete enclosure of the process, and/or local exhaust ventilation.
4. Modify the process to prevent/minimise the contact with hands by establishing and implementing good working practices.

Protect The Skin

In situations where adequate control of skin exposure cannot be achieved by the above methods, provide suitable personal protection (e.g. PPE and/or skin care products).

Check

Regular skin checks can help with early detection of dermatitis, which can prevent more serious cases of dermatitis developing. Checks can help identify any gaps in preventative measures and the need to reassess skin protection as appropriate.

In situations where adequate control of skin exposure cannot be achieved by other methods, use suitable personal protection such as PPE and/or skin care products.

Skin Care

Skin care products help to maintain the skin in good condition and retain its protective function. The main types of skin care products are: pre-work creams, skin cleansers and after-work creams. When selecting skin care products, always consult competent manufacturers or suppliers. Alternatively, seek medical advice from a doctor or a nurse. Wherever possible use dispensers to dispense product onto the hands to reduce the risk of cross contamination (avoid 'dipping in' to tubs and buckets). Use sealed cartridge systems to optimise hygiene levels.



Employees should receive training for the correct use of cleansers and creams provided. HSE COSHH guidelines recommend use of pre and after-work creams. Incorrect selection and use of skin care products may not help to reduce skin disease. If you are unsure what to choose then ask for advice from the supplier or a health and safety advisor.

Pre-Work Creams

Pre-work creams are formulated to make hands easier to clean after work and may help protect skin, although they are not a substitute for protective gloves. These creams will facilitate the cleaning process, allowing the use of less powerful hand cleansers. Pre-work creams are useful where gloves are considered unnecessary.

Skin Cleansers

These remove contaminants from the skin. Use the mildest cleanser possible to remove the contaminants in your workplace: seek manufacturers' advice where necessary. Do not use harsh cleansers or substitutes (for example solvents such as white spirit). Use non-solvent-based cleansers whenever possible. Wash hands even after wearing gloves. Always rinse hands well and dry thoroughly using disposable paper towels if possible.

After-Work Creams (Moisturisers)

These restore the moisture content of the skin and provide a valuable contribution to reducing the risk of irritant dermatitis. They help to replenish the skin's natural oils and prevent dryness. Use them at the end of each work shift or after washing the hands, or more frequently if advised by a doctor or a nurse. A non-tainting formulation should be used for food service or manufacturing areas.

Protective Gloves and Clothing

An 'any gloves will do' approach is a recipe for dermatitis. The law requires that the gloves must be matched to the substance, the work environment, the work and the wearer. Glove types vary significantly for different work environments. Gloves should be selected which have been approved to the appropriate EN standard for the specific work situation. The glove supplier or manufacturer should be consulted to ensure suitability; most manufacturers offer a hand protection assessment survey, often free of charge. The gloves selected should be able to provide adequate protection against the hazard. Effective gloves should minimise skin contamination when used correctly. Other considerations when selecting a suitable glove should be sizing, dexterity (e.g. the ability to do the task safely whilst wearing the gloves), user comfort and duration of wear/use – no glove gives indefinite or 100% protection. The performance of protective gloves and clothing critically depends on the type of material, thickness, size, extent of chemical / substance permeation, penetration, degradation and duration of wear.

Always train staff using protective gloves to ensure that they know how to put on and remove gloves correctly to avoid skin contamination. Also, suitable storage and disposal facilities need to be provided.

Selecting suitable gloves and clothing is a complex process. The same guidance applies to other protective clothing.

When selecting gloves or protective clothing, always involve the workforce and seek expert help from one or more of the following:

- The manufacturer/supplier of the chemical/workplace substances in use
- The gloves/clothing manufacturer/supplier
- A health and safety professional

Do not use gloves or protective clothing for more than a day unless the manufacturer can guarantee extended use. Never launder gloves or single use protective clothing unless the manufacturer can guarantee the post laundered performance. Always keep protective gloves and clothing intended for multiple use clean.

Gloves should always be applied to clean hands and hands should be washed after wearing gloves.

Professional Sunscreen protects the skin from the dangers of UV Radiation

Currently, between 2 and 3 million non-melanoma skin cancers and 132,000 melanoma skin cancers occur globally each year

Up to 90% of skin cancer deaths could be prevented if exposure to UV is controlled¹

Understanding Sunscreen Specifications

Hats and other clothing are the best protection, but sunscreens provide protection against ultraviolet (UV) light from the sun (UVA and UVB) for parts of the body which are not easy to cover up. Outdoor workers should be encouraged to use a good quality sunscreen which protects against both UVA and UVB:

Sun Protection Factor

The Sun Protection Factor relates to the sun burn protection factor, as it primarily shows the level of protection against UVB. For outdoor working, a minimum SPF of 30 is recommended.

SPF50 provides high protection according to EU guidelines.

UVA

According to the EU Recommendation, the UVA protection for a specific sunscreen should be at least a third of the labelled SPF. A sunscreen which achieves this should display the following logo on the packaging:



Skin Cancer - Introduction

What Causes Skin Cancer?

Skin cancer can be caused by prolonged contact with carcinogens, such as used mineral oils including engine and some machine oils, coal tars and pitches.

Outdoor workers and drivers may also be at risk of skin cancer, caused by exposure to UV from the sun's radiation.

How Do I Recognise Skin Cancer?

Skin cancer can be divided into two main groups: non-melanoma skin cancer and malignant melanoma. Malignant melanoma is the rarest form of skin cancer, but is the most serious and can kill. Malignant melanoma is curable if treated early. Delay in diagnosis can result in it spreading to other sites and organs within the body.

Medical advice should be sought if a mole changes shape (irregular outline), colour, increases in size, becomes itchy, painful, starts to bleed or becomes crusty and/or looks inflamed.

Skin Cancer Facts

Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the UK. 86% of melanoma skin cancer cases are preventable. There are around 173,600 new cases diagnosed and around 2,500 deaths per year in the UK. 92.7% survive melanoma skin cancer for 10 or more years². Research has shown that the skin cancer incidence rate for construction workers is six times higher than that for the general population.

The Risk Of Sun Exposure To Outdoor Workers

Long-term exposure to the sun causes skin damage and every episode of sunburn increases the risk of getting skin cancer. Outdoor workers are at risk if they are working outside in sunny, shady or cloudy conditions without suitable protection.

Those most at risk include:

- People with very fair skin that burns easily
- People with a personal or family history of skin cancer
- People with lots of moles (more than 50)
- People being treated with immunosuppressive drugs

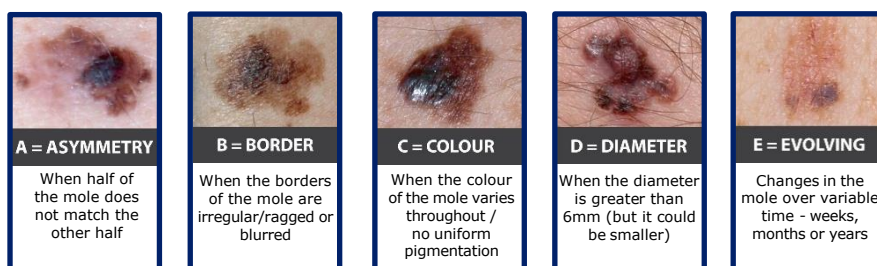
Your Legal Obligations

In terms of chemical carcinogens, the same legal obligations apply as with workplace dermatitis.

In terms of UV solar exposure, employers have a duty of care to protect their employees from hazards in the workplace and according to HSE guidelines, UV radiation should be considered an occupational hazard for people who work outdoors.

Remember the ABCDE of Melanoma³

The ABCDE of melanoma rule (below) will help you to remember what to look out for - the example photographs show abnormal moles and melanomas, but remember yours may not look exactly like these, so if you notice any changes or unusual marks that have lasted more than a few weeks you must consult your doctor immediately. A melanoma can grow anywhere on your body, so it is important to check your entire body regularly (once per month) for any changes or abnormalities.



¹Source: <https://iosh.com/guidance-and-resources/business/preventing-occupational-cancer/sun-safety>

²Source: www.cancerresearchuk.org/health-professional/cancer-statistics/statistics-by-cancer-type/non-melanoma-skin-cancer

³Source: www.skcin.org/downloads/skcin-booklet.pdf

Preventing Skin Cancer In The Workplace

Control Measures

In terms of skin cancer caused by chemical carcinogens, the same advice should be followed as that for workplace dermatitis.

For outdoor workers and drivers:

Where outdoor working cannot be avoided, include sun protection advice in routine health & safety training – make sure workers understand the risks of sun exposure – even on cloudy days and in the shade. Include sun exposure as part of your hazard risk assessment.

The same advice applies to drivers, as glass is not completely sunproof: most glass used for windows blocks UVB but not UVA.

Encourage workers to follow the following advice:



SHADE

- Seek shade and work in a shaded area where possible to reduce risk exposure. Sun protection is still required in shaded areas.



COVER UP

- Workers should keep their tops on.
- Wear a hat if appropriate: where possible, choose a broad brimmed hat to provide ear and neck protection. Wear sunglasses with UV protection.
- Workers should take breaks in the shade, but be reminded that they still need to be protected in the shade.



PROTECT

- Apply sun protection every day over the mid-year period (Easter to end August at least – remember those Indian summer days in September too).
- Apply minimum factor 30 sunscreen with good quality UV protection to all exposed areas including the face, tops of/ behind the ears, neck and arms.
- Apply to clean, dry skin.
- Apply 15 to 20 minutes before going in the sun and again once outside, then re-apply liberally every 2-3 hours, more frequently if perspiring.



- Drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration.



CHECK

- Encourage workers to check their skin regularly and to seek medical advice if they find any unusual moles, spots or other changes to the skin.

Mineral Oils



Prolonged contact with mineral oils can result in ulcers and sore patches on the skin which do not heal and may signal the development of skin cancer. Apart from the hands, face and areas in direct contact, other areas may be affected. Particularly important for male workers is the scrotum.

Problems can occur when oily cloths are habitually kept in overall pockets, overalls are not cleaned regularly, or workers regularly fail to wash hands before going to the toilet.

Work Related Skin Disease

- Is common and many individuals live with pain, discomfort and suffering.
- Can cause people to lose their jobs or force a career change because they can no longer work.
- Results in £millions being paid out to victims in compensation.
- Costs industry £millions each year in sickness, absence and retraining costs.
- Treatment takes up valuable resources of the National Health Service.

Checklist

- Share the content of this guide with all your employees
- Ensure everyone is aware of the risks to skin in your workplace
- Make sure that all employees have access to appropriate PPE and skin care – see our guide by work sector overleaf
- Use this campaign poster around your workplace to remind everyone of the risks of skin disease and how to avoid these risks

MORE INFORMATION

For more information, check the following websites:

www.bsif.co.uk
www.safetygroupsuk.org.uk
www.skcin.org
www.iom-world.org

www.hse.gov.uk
www.bohs.org
www.tuc.org.uk
www.scjip.com

Skin Care Considerations By Work Sector

Risk Assessment

A risk assessment is an essential first step for all sectors. Look on pages 3, 4 and 6 of this guide for more information.

Safe Working Distance (SWD)

SWD is an important approach to reduce dermal exposure in the workplace. In many instances, when hands are being used as tools, they are frequently immersed in chemicals and/or water. This means there is no SWD. However, SWD between the hands and hazardous substances can be achieved in many ways, for example by using tongs or a wire basket to remove articles from a water bath. Try to implement the principle as described, in order, below:

Avoid Skin Contact

1. Try to eliminate the use of a hazardous substance or wet working (e.g. by using an alternative process).
2. Use less harmful substances (e.g. substitution).
3. Control the exposure by use of engineering controls such as automated handling, complete enclosure of the process or tools that increase the SWD.
4. Modify the process to prevent/minimise the contact with hands by establishing and implementing good working practices.

Protect The Skin

In situations where adequate control of skin exposure cannot be achieved by the above methods, provide suitable protection (e.g. PPE and/or skin care products). However, remember that prolonged wearing of gloves may also increase the risk of dermatitis. The guide below details skin care considerations for key work sectors, once the risk assessment has been completed.

Check

Regular skin health checks can help with early detection of dermatitis, which can prevent more serious disease developing. Checks can also help identify any gaps in preventative measures and the need to reassess skin protection as appropriate.

WORK AREA	SKIN CARE CONSIDERATIONS
Office Areas	• Ensure soap and hot and cold running water is available in washrooms
Industrial Manufacturing including automotive and heavy engineering	• Use PPE to minimise contact with contaminants and chemicals. However, avoid prolonged wearing of impervious gloves • Pre-work cream makes hands easier to clean after work and may help protect the skin • Select the mildest hand cleanser possible and choose product according to the type of contaminants in your workplace • Use a moisturising after-work cream at the end of each work period • Use sealed cartridge hand cleanser dispensers or pump packs wherever possible to avoid the risk of cross contamination
Outdoor Workers including construction/building trades and mobile workers	• Use PPE (e.g. gloves) to minimise contact with contaminants and chemicals. Pay particular attention when working with materials such as irritant chemicals or cement, which can cause severe burns as a result of direct contact or as a result of insufficient PPE protection. Do not wear impervious gloves continuously as this may exacerbate skin problems • Pre-work cream makes hands easier to clean after work and may help protect the skin • Ensure that when outside, workers are aware of the risks of exposure to the sun and use sunscreen on any exposed areas • Select the mildest hand cleanser possible and choose product according to the type of contaminants in your workplace • For workers with restricted access to hand washing facilities, provide a hand cleanser or wipes designed for use without water • Use a moisturising after-work cream at the end of each work period to restore the moisture content of the skin
Food Manufacture & Service	• Use gloves where required, but avoid using these continuously or for long periods • Minimise the number of times hands are washed in water, consistent with food hygiene requirements. • Use a non-tainting, anti-bacterial hand cleanser • Provide after-work creams for use at the end of each work period to restore the moisture content of the skin
Personal Care Sector including cleaning, hairdressing and other jobs	• Use gloves where appropriate, e.g. when washing hair or handling chemicals, but avoid overuse • Provide a good quality, mild hand soap in dispensers to reduce the risks posed by wet working • Rinse hands and dry thoroughly • Provide after-work creams for use at the end of each work period to restore the moisture content of the skin