

A Resource Kit for Career Counsellors

SKIN

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WORK

About this kit

The 'Skin @ Work' education kit aims to raise awareness of a potential work-related skin problem – dermatitis.

It has been specifically designed and developed for career counsellors, and includes resources for students and their parents. Career counsellors are targeted because they are in a unique position to provide pre-employment advice to young people about future careers.

Kit contents

- Information booklet for career counsellors
- Student brochures
- Student flyer
- Brochure stand
- Poster for display in schools
- Article for school newsletter
- Order form
- Evaluation form

For effective prevention of work-related skin problems, there needs to be involvement from all interested parties, including teachers, pupils and parents and also the workplace.

The need for this kit was identified after a study was conducted by our organization (refer to Saunders H, Keegel T, Nixon R, Frowen K. Career counsellors and occupational contact dermatitis, April 2003). *Contact Dermatitis*, 48 (4) 189-90. The study highlighted that very

few career counsellors identified eczema as a risk factor for developing dermatitis, when advising students about careers. In our clinic we have also found that many young people have had to give up their job after a relatively short time, because of skin problems.

Feedback is vital to ensure a useable resource for counsellors and students. An evaluation form is included in this kit. It would be appreciated if it could be completed and returned in the reply paid envelope or visit www.occdern.asn.au for electronic online submission.

About our organisation

The Occupational Dermatology Research and Education Centre (ODREC) was founded in 2001 and is funded by the Department of Health and Ageing as the National Collaborative Centre for Research and Education into Occupational Contact Dermatitis.

Contact Details:

PO Box 132,
Carlton South, Vic, 3053
Ph. (03) 9639 9633
Fax. (03) 9639 9644
Web. www.occdern.asn.au

Introduction

Young people are at risk of developing work-related skin problems such as dermatitis. This can develop whether they are on work experience, undertaking an apprenticeship or whether they are working part time or full time. If a person develops dermatitis they may have to change their duties at work or even leave their chosen career.

What is Dermatitis?

Dermatitis is a skin condition caused by things that touch the skin. The hands are most commonly affected. The skin becomes dry, red, itchy, cracked and eventually blistered and painful.

There are 3 types of dermatitis:

- Irritant contact dermatitis
- Allergic contact dermatitis
- Contact urticaria

Sometimes people can have more than one of these skin conditions at the same time.

Risk factors

Having a personal or family history of asthma, eczema or hay fever, even as a baby, increases the risk of developing dermatitis. In fact, those who have had eczema at any age are four times more likely to develop work-related dermatitis.

High-risk careers

Young people working in jobs which involve wet work, the need for frequent hand washing and the use of chemicals, are at risk.

These jobs include:

- Hairdressing
- Healthcare
- Food handling
- Automotive maintenance
- Construction

Good skin care can reduce the risk of developing these career threatening conditions.



Advice for career counsellors

Career counsellors have an important role in advising students about their future job choice. The Skin@Work resource package encourages career counsellors to talk about skin safety when counselling students.

This may include;

- Discussing the issue of workplace skin problems with students during counselling sessions particularly those at highest risk
- Displaying brochures and distributing them to students interested in these careers
- Displaying the 'Skin@Work' poster around the school
- Informing students about where they can find further information



Skin Protection in the workplace

Even though career counsellors may not be in the workplace with the student, they can give advice to students about how to look after their skin at work and dangers to look out for.

This advice may include:

- Avoid performing more than 4 hours of wet work in a shift whenever possible. This can include washing parts, washing hair and handling wet foods.
- Avoid using strong hand soaps, if possible
- Dry hands well especially between the fingers
- Remove rings at work, as water, detergents and chemicals can get trapped underneath.
- Moisturise the hands regularly, especially at the end of the day
- The importance of wearing personal protection such as gloves when they are provided
- Knowing that different gloves are available for different tasks
- If there is trouble with sweaty hands when wearing gloves, cotton gloves can be worn underneath

It is important to also encourage students to see a doctor as early as possible if they are having skin problems.

Irritant Contact Dermatitis

What is it?

Irritant contact dermatitis is the most common type of work-related dermatitis. Skin dryness is usually the first sign and often starts in the web spaces between the fingers. This condition may take months to heal, which is why it is important to protect the skin before damage occurs.

What does irritant contact dermatitis look like?

The skin is:

- Dry
- Red
- Cracked



What can irritate the skin?

- Water and wet work e.g. continually wetting and drying the hands
- Soaps and detergents e.g. skin cleansers and shampoo
- Solvents e.g. turpentine, fuel, kerosene, thinners
- Heat and sweating e.g. from wearing water-proof gloves for long periods
- Cement and other dusts
- Oils and cooling fluids

What are the risk factors?

People who have a personal or family history of eczema, asthma or hay fever are at a higher risk of developing irritant contact dermatitis— even if they only had eczema as a baby or child. Often people are unaware that they had childhood eczema, so it's a good idea they check with their parents.

Allergic Contact Dermatitis

What is it?

People can become allergic to things they touch at work. If the skin is already dry and damaged, the risk of developing an allergy to something becomes higher.

Allergy can develop at any time in a person's career. The dermatitis starts a few hours or days after contact.

Once a person is allergic to something it is likely to last forever.

What does allergic contact dermatitis look like?

The skin is:

- Itchy
- Red
- Flaky
- Tiny fluid filled blisters
- Weeping



What can cause skin allergy?

- Hair dyes, hair bleach and perm solution
- Preservatives in oils and coolants and antiseptic cleansers
- Epoxy resins e.g. glues used in construction
- Foods handled by chefs e.g. garlic and onion
- Chromate found in cement

Note: it is common to develop an allergy to a product, even if you have used it for many years.

Contact Urticaria

What is it?

Contact urticaria is a different type of allergy. It occurs within minutes of something touching the skin.

What does contact urticaria look like?

- Hives on the skin
- Reddening and itching
- Swelling
- May also cause runny nose, sneezing and asthma

What causes contact urticaria?

- Natural rubber latex from powdered disposable latex gloves
- Foods, such as seafood, flour, some fruits and vegetables
- Bleach, which is used by hairdressers



Soaps and hand cleansers

- In the workplace situation, some soaps and hand cleaners are unnecessarily harsh or strong, especially for people with easily irritated skin. Use a more gentle soap
- Avoid using solvents such as petrol or thinners to clean hands, as these are very irritating to the skin



Moisturise

- Apply moisturising cream. Sorbolene cream is best
- Always apply at the end of the day and before bed
- Rub well into the hands and wrists, including the web spaces between the fingers



Gloves

- Wearing gloves is important to protect the skin, especially if contact with irritants and allergens cannot be avoided
- Different gloves may be needed for different tasks. Check with your boss
- Wear powder-free gloves
- Latex gloves should only be worn when there is possible contact with bodily fluids
- Latex gloves should not be worn when handling food
- Do not re-use disposable gloves
- Do not share gloves with others, it is not hygienic
- Wearing cotton gloves under waterproof gloves may help stop sweating
- Gloves should be changed regularly, to help stop sweating



Important tips

- Dry hands with a towel or air dryer, rather than paper towels, where possible
- Remember to dry thoroughly between fingers and under rings
- Avoid performing more than 4 hours of wet work in a shift whenever possible.

Responsibilities in the workplace

It is important that young people understand that though they have a role in looking after their health in the workplace, so does their employer.

Employer responsibilities

Each state in Australia has laws which outline employer's responsibilities such as:

- Providing a safe and healthy workplace
- Providing training for the job
- Encouraging employees to report any hazards or dangers in the workplace
- Providing the right protection such as gloves, goggles, earmuffs
- Informing all employees about workers' compensation

More information is available by contacting your local WorkCover Authority

Employee responsibilities

As an employee your responsibilities include;

- Following safety rules and attending safety training
- Reporting unsafe work practices
- Reporting any skin problems or other injuries as soon as possible
- Wearing protective clothing which is provided
- Keeping your work area clean and tidy

Further information and advice

Organisation	Website	Phone number
Occupational Dermatology Research and Education Centre	www.occderm.asn.au	03 9639 9633
OASCC/DEWR	www.dewr.gov.au	02 6121 6000
Australian Capital Territory WorkCover Authority	www.workcover.act.gov.au	02 6205 0200
New South Wales WorkCover Authority	www.workcover.nsw.gov.au	02 4321 5000
Northern Territory WorkCover Authority	www.worksafe.nt.gov.au	1800 019 115
Queensland WorkCover Authority	www.workcover.qld.gov.au	1300 362 128
Tasmanian WorkCover Authority	www.workcover.tas.gov.au	03 6233 7657
Victorian WorkCover Authority	www.workcover.vic.gov.au	1800 136 089
Western Australia WorkCover Authority	www.workcover.wa.gov.au	1300 794 744

Are Young People Choosing the Right Career for their Skin?

It is vital that young people are given appropriate pre-employment advice about the risk of developing skin problems at work. The most common work-related skin condition is occupational contact dermatitis.

What is Occupational Contact Dermatitis?

Work related contact dermatitis is a skin condition caused by things that people come into contact with at work. The hands are most commonly affected. Young people are at risk of developing work related skin problems whether they are on work experience, undertaking an apprenticeship or whether they are working casually, part time or full time. Wet work, the use of soaps and detergents, or handling chemicals may cause this condition.

Who is at risk?

People with a personal or family history of asthma, eczema or hay fever, even eczema as a baby, are more likely to develop this condition.

What are the high risk career groups?

- Hairdressing
- Healthcare
- Food handling
- Automotive maintenance
- Construction



How can occupational contact dermatitis be prevented?

- Reduce the amount of wet work whenever possible e.g. hand washing
- Use a mild soap or soap substitute, instead of strong soaps
- Minimise direct contact with chemicals
- Wear protective clothing provided
- Wear the right gloves for the job
- Use a greasy moisturizer, especially after work

The role of the workplace

By law the employer has an important role in preventing work-related skin problems, along with other workplace injuries.

The employer should:

- Provide a safe and healthy workplace
- Provide training for the job
- Encourage employees to report hazards
- Provide the right protection such as gloves
- Inform employees about workers' compensation

Employee's responsibilities

In the workplace, employees also have responsibilities.

Employees should:

- Follow safety rules and attend safety training
- Report unsafe work practices
- Report any skin problems or other injuries as soon as possible
- Wear protective clothing which is provided
- Keep work areas clean and tidy





For more information please contact the Occupational Dermatology Research and Education Centre on (03) 9639 9633 or visit www.occderm.asn.au

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