

What to do if you have hand dermatitis: Practical steps for healthcare workers

Report skin problem to management

- Reporting a skin problem can allow workplaces to keep a register of hand problems in a particular department or across the whole organisation. You may be asked to try alternative products.
- Report skin problems early, don't wait until your hands are in bad condition
- If your hands are sore, don't stop following hand hygiene, as you risk your own health and your patients' health with hospital acquired infection

Good skin care practice

Reduce hand washing

- Hand washing is the most common cause of hand dermatitis
- Reduce hand washing where possible (unless hands visibly soiled) and use ABHR instead
- Use mild hand wash where possible
- Use warm water and not hot water for hand washing
- Dry hands thoroughly

Use alcohol based hand rubs (ABHR)

- Use ABHR where possible
- ABHR may sting hands if split and cracked. If it does sting, it does not mean you are allergic to it.

Moisturise

- Moisturise regularly
- Especially at the start of the day, at meal breaks, after work and before bed.
- A cream in a tub or tube is more effective than a lotion in a pump pack.

At home

- Use soap substitutes where possible
- Reduce the amount of wet work by using appropriate gloves
- Moisturise regularly

See GP or Staff Health Clinic

If the previous advice has not improved your hand dermatitis, you will need to see a doctor:

- You may need script for topical corticosteroid ointment or cream to apply to your hands
- You may need to have a blood test to determine if you are allergic to latex (RAST)
- You may need some time off to let your skin heal, or a rostering change

See a dermatologist

- If there has still not been improvement, you may need a referral from your GP to see a dermatologist or attend Dermatology Outpatient Clinic
- You may be referred to a special clinic for patch testing.
- Patch testing is used to diagnose an allergy to something that your skin is coming into contact with.