

Prevention of hand dermatitis at work

Repeated exposure to water and the use of soap, alcohol hand gel, and other detergents can cause dry skin, and a type of eczema known as irritant contact dermatitis

Irritant contact dermatitis can cause the skin to itch, become sore and red, and develop small blisters or painful cracks.

If you already have dry skin either from a skin condition, or because you are washing your hands more than normal, then you may be particularly susceptible to this.

Tips to minimise the impact of frequent handwashing on the skin:

- Wash your hands in line with government guidance, using soap and water. While this can be difficult for people with dry and cracked skin, we advise you follow the government guidance as much as is practical.
- When washing your hands, wet them with water first, before applying the soap
- Dry your hands fully after washing by patting them dry, not rubbing.
- Moisturisers (emollients) are an essential part of treating hand dermatitis. They help repair the damaged outer skin and lock moisture inside the skin making it soft and supple again. Moisturisers should be applied generously after every handwash, repeatedly through the day, and whenever your skin feels dry.
- Some people find overnight moisturising treatments beneficial. Apply a generous layer of a plain moisturiser just before you go to bed, then put on a pair of clean cotton gloves and leave overnight.
- Protect your hands with nitrile gloves during wet work such as washing up, personal care of patients, or when using detergents and cleaning products to keep the skin's natural barrier intact

Recommended moisturisers (emollients)

These moisturisers are all dermatologist recommended, are low in preservatives, hypoallergenic, fragrance free and colour free. They can be prescribed or purchased over the counter or online.

Creams and gels for use at work and at home:

- Zerobase cream
- Isomol gel
- Epimax cream
- Balneum cream

Thick ointments for very dry or damaged skin:

- Zeroderm ointment
- Epimax ointment
- Emollin *spray*