



Damage to skin

What should I know?

First, read the section entitled Hazardous substances, pages 9–12.

Using hazardous substances at work can put your employees' health at risk. Therefore, the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (COSHH) place duties on you to take measures to prevent or control the exposure.

Skin contact with hazardous substances at work can cause:

- » dermatitis and burns
- » cancers of the skin
- » diseases in other parts of the body.

The signs, symptoms and effects of the damage can include:

- » dry, red, itchy skin
- » flaking, blistering, cracking
- » swelling and pain
- » skin irritation, severe skin damage, skin sensitisation and allergy
- » sickness absence and loss of productivity
- » enforcement action, court cases, compensation claims.

The damage is often caused by skin coming into frequent and prolonged contact with a range of substances, including:

- » chemicals and chemicals contained in products (e.g. paints, glues)
- » solvents
- » water (wet work)
- » natural substances (e.g. food ingredients, wood dust, latex rubber proteins)
- » the sun.

Am I at risk?

You, your business and staff may be at risk, if:

- » you use substances labelled as Irritant, Corrosive, Harmful, Toxic or Very Toxic
- » employees' hands are immersed in or come into direct contact with hazardous substances
- » employees' hands come into contact with surfaces that are heavily contaminated with hazardous substances (e.g. work surfaces, tools or workwear such as coveralls, gloves, boots)

- » excessive solvent splash, spray or dust frequently lands on the skin
- » the insides of protective gloves are contaminated with hazardous substances.

What should I do?

Establish or carry out the following:

- » Are there substances used, produced or created in your workplace that can cause dermatitis?
- » Get an up-to-date safety data sheet (SDS).
- » Who is exposed, how, why and for how long?
- » What control measures are needed to prevent skin contact?
- » Who needs protective gloves and what type?
- » What types of skin protection cream are needed?
- » Who should receive regular skin checks for early detection of skin problems?
- » Do employees have any pre-existing skin problems?
- » Ensure control measures you provide are used correctly and maintained.

- » Consult employees or their representatives on matters affecting their health and safety.

What should I avoid?

- » Using hands as a tool to perform a task, instead of using a tool or an alternative handling method.
- » Frequent and daily skin contact with substances without protection.
- » Excessive skin contact with water (e.g. washing the hands more than 20 times, or hands in contact with water more than 2 hours a day).
- » Using gloves that are contaminated inside.
- » Using solvents or aggressive cleaners to remove dirt from the skin.
- » Prolonged exposure to the sun without protection.

Where can I get help?

- » Scottish Centre for Healthy Working Lives, tel: 0800 019 2211 or www.healthyworkinglives.com
- » Health and Safety Executive, www.hse.gov.uk/skin

For further details see 'Where to get extra help and support' on pages 83–88.

Additional information

There are three simple steps to prevent dermatitis:

Avoid skin contact:

- » Substitute a hazardous substance, material or product with a safer alternative.
- » Automate the process.
- » Enclose the process as much as you can, to minimise skin contact.
- » Use mechanical handling.
- » Do not allow workers' hands to be used as tools (i.e. in direct contact with hazardous substances).
- » Use a safe working distance (SWD) between the hands and hazardous substances.
- » Ensure extraction systems are designed professionally, used correctly, checked and maintained as recommended in the extraction system manual.

Protect the skin:

- » Tell workers why and how to avoid skin contact.

- » Provide suitable gloves and coveralls where necessary.
- » Make sure gloves are the right size, of the right type and material for the task and the substance.
- » Make sure workers use and store gloves correctly.
- » Replace gloves as recommended by the supplier.
- » Provide mild skin cleansers and encourage workers to clean their hands regularly.
- » Provide moisturisers and encourage workers to use them.

Check for the early signs of dermatitis:

- » Carry out regular visual skin checks to detect dry-looking, flaking, scaling, cracking or swollen skin.
- » Act immediately on any signs and symptoms of injury and encourage early reporting.
- » Get medical help as soon as you spot symptoms – either get help from an occupational health nurse or ask the affected worker to see their GP.

This is not a full list.

Skincare products

What should I know?

Skincare products help to remove dirt and keep the skin hydrated and lubricated. There are three main types:

- » pre-work or protective creams
- » skin cleansers
- » moisturisers

You are required by law to provide adequate welfare facilities for your employees. These are needed to maintain a good standard of personal hygiene for controlling exposure to hazardous substances. Incorrect selection and use of skin cleansers and creams can cause skin exposure to hazardous substances (chemicals and some natural products), and can lead to:

- » skin disease (e.g. dermatitis, burns)
- » skin cancer and other diseases.

The signs, symptoms and effects include:

- » irritation, flaking, blistering, burns to the skin
- » allergic reactions, sensitisation
- » pain, discomfort
- » sickness absence or loss of productivity
- » enforcement action, court cases, compensation claims.

Am I at risk?

You, your business and staff may be at risk, if:

- » solvent-based cleansers are used
- » hands get heavily contaminated, thereby requiring extensive cleaning
- » nail areas remain contaminated after cleaning
- » an employee has a pre-existing skin condition.

What should I do?

- » Ensure your risk assessment has considered the need to use skincare products.
- » Use handling methods that limit extensive hand contamination.
- » Ensure employees can access washing facilities, creams and cleansers in the work area.
- » Train users in the correct use of cleansers and creams.
- » Ensure the control measures you provide are used correctly and maintained.
- » Consult employees and their representatives on matters affecting their health and safety.

What should I avoid?

- » Immersing hands (including gloved hands) in chemicals.
- » Using solvents or solvent-based wipes to clean hands.
- » Forgetting to apply moisturisers after cleaning.

Where can I get help?

- » Scottish Centre for Healthy Working Lives, tel: 0800 019 2211 or www.healthyworkinglives.com
- » Health and Safety Executive, www.hse.gov.uk/skin

For further details see 'Where to get extra help and support' on pages 83–88.

Additional information

Product selection

The three main types of skincare products are described below:

Pre-work or protective creams

Protective creams are designed for use before starting work, and provide a semi-resistant barrier between chemicals and the skin. They are not a replacement for protective gloves because they do not provide a complete barrier against hazardous substances. It is important to remember that selection should be made on the basis of the most appropriate properties for the substance:

- » Vanishing creams are designed to trap resins, dyes, etc.
- » Water-resistant creams form a layer on the skin and repel water.
- » Oil- and solvent-resistant creams repel oils, tars and certain solvents.
- » Other types of pre-work cream react with supplier-specified substances.

Skin cleansers

These help to remove contaminants from the skin. A 'suitable' cleanser (the most effective but least powerful) removes most of the contamination without causing unacceptable skin damage. Ask the supplier for the least aggressive cleanser for the relevant substances. Immediately rinsing the skin with water and mild soap is often enough to remove irritants and allergens.

- » Select solvent-free or mild cleansers.
- » The need to use an aggressive cleanser would suggest that your skin exposure control measures may not be adequate.

Moisturisers

These are creams, lotions or ointments that replace lost moisture and oil. You should consider the following points:

- » They should be applied at least once a day and preferably more frequently (ideally, every time the hands are washed and dried).
- » Provide alcohol-free moisturisers.
- » Avoid moisturisers that take a long time to be absorbed by the skin or are too runny.

Look for the following when selecting skin cleansers or creams:

- » Does the product have a guide on its correct usage?
- » Does the product-dispensing system meet your needs, e.g. wall-mounting/personal issue?

This is not a full list.

Protective gloves

What should I know?

Using hazardous substances at work can put your employees' health at risk. Therefore, the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (COSHH) place duties on you to take measures to prevent or control the exposure.

Many gloves used at work are not correctly selected, used or stored. These failures can lead to skin exposure to hazardous substances (chemicals or some natural products) which can cause:

- » skin diseases (e.g. dermatitis, burns)
- » skin and other cancers
- » diseases in other parts of the body (e.g. heart, kidneys, reproductive system).

The signs, symptoms and effects of disease can include:

- » dry, red, itchy skin
- » flaking, blistering, cracking
- » swelling and pain
- » skin irritation, severe skin damage, skin sensitisation and allergy
- » sickness absence and loss of productivity
- » enforcement action, court cases, compensation claims.

Am I at risk?

You, your business and staff may be put at risk, if:

- » you do not know how to select the appropriate gloves
- » you do not use or store gloves correctly
- » damaged gloves are used
- » the insides of the gloves are contaminated
- » employees' hands become contaminated when putting on or taking off gloves
- » employees suffer from existing skin problems.

What should I do?

- » Work out which jobs and activities cause skin exposure, and why gloves are needed.
- » Get up-to-date safety data sheets for all chemical products.
- » Select the right gloves for the substance, task, wearer and environment.
- » If you must use latex gloves, use only 'low-protein, powder-free' type.
- » Ensure gloves do not cause significant interference with work.
- » Only use 'CE' marked gloves.
- » Use gloves as recommended.
- » Train wearers in correct use, including glove breaks and skincare.

Ensure the control measures you provide are used correctly and maintained. Consult workers or their representatives on matters affecting their health and safety.

What should I avoid?

- » Immersing even gloved hands in chemicals.
- » Using the wrong glove material and size.
- » Using the wrong type of glove.
- » Using damaged or internally contaminated gloves.
- » Wearing gloves beyond their useful lifetime.
- » Storing gloves on contaminated surfaces.
- » Incorrect removal of used gloves.

Where can I get help?

- » Scottish Centre for Healthy Working Lives, tel: 0800 019 2211 or www.healthyworkinglives.com
- » Health and Safety Executive, www.hse.gov.uk/skin

For further details see 'Where to get extra help and support' on pages 83–88.

Additional information

The first rule of skin protection

So far as is reasonably practicable, keep hazardous substances away from hands by means other than gloves.

Gloves are not a substitute for control measures such as:

- » suitable handling methods
- » extraction of contaminated air
- » containment in an enclosure
- » suppression of dust, mist, splashes
- » a safe working distance.

The 'CE' mark:

- » means gloves meets the minimum design and performance features, as set out in law and international standards
- » does not mean they are necessarily the right type. You must select the right gloves for your needs. Get help where necessary.

Select the right glove

Match it to the:

- » substance and form (e.g. chemicals as dust, fumes, liquid, mist, spray, vapour, gas, paste)
- » task factors (e.g. hot, abrasive, sharps, electrical, length of glove)
- » wearer (e.g. size, skin condition)
- » environment (e.g. hot or cold, climbing as part of the work).

Using gloves

- » No glove is tested to give chemical protection for more than 8 hours from its first use. Chemicals can penetrate an undamaged glove. If you want to use it for longer, seek supplier's advice.
- » Where practicable, wipe gloves clean before taking them off.
- » Throw away 'single-use' gloves when they are taken off.

Provide training

This will ensure:

- » the correct use and storage of gloves
- » the correct procedure is used for putting on and removing gloves.

This is not a full list.

Information for glove supplier

Task or job for which gloves are needed (e.g. handling degreased items)					
Chemicals in products (get an up-to-date safety data sheet from your product supplier)					
Physical form of product	Gas		Liquid		Dust
	Paste		Oily		Other
If a solid, how dusty is it?	High		Medium		Low
If liquid, what is its boiling point?					°C
What temperature is the product used at?	Room temperature				°C
How long does the task take?	Hours		Minutes		
How many times a day is the task performed?					times
How does the hand come into contact with the product?	Dipping		Splashing		
	Touching		All three		
How far do the chemicals and contamination reach?	Hands		Forearms		
	Above elbows				
Are there other hazards associated with the task?	Hot		Cold		Sharps
	Abrasive		Electric shock		Moving parts
	Others				
Touch and grip requirements	Fine work		High grip needed		
Important What size range is needed to meet the needs of wearers?	6		7		
	8		9		
	10		11		
Are fine inner gloves needed for continuous glove wear?	Yes		No		

Protective gloves selection

What should I know?

Gloves must be used where it is not possible to achieve adequate control of exposure by other control measures alone, and then only in addition to such measures.

Other exposure control measures include:

- » eliminating the use of the toxic substance
- » replacing it with a low toxicity substance
- » enclosing the process so that the hazardous substance does not escape onto workplace surfaces, tools and into the air)
- » modifying the way you do the job, using suitable handling methods, equipment and tools, to minimise skin contact
- » establishing an adequate safe working distance (SWD) between hands and the hazardous substance
- » reducing the number of employees exposed to the hazardous substance.

When can I use gloves?

- » After using other control measures.
- » For short-duration or infrequent jobs where installing other controls may not be practicable.
- » When you are putting in place other control measures.
- » Emergency repairs or work.
- » For rescuing someone in danger (e.g. a contaminated person).

In addition, you may consider issuing gloves to provide additional protection in case other control measures fail to operate.

What should I do?

- » You may use the table on page 45 or seek the help of a professional to select the right gloves.
- » If you are unsure about or do not know answers to any of the issues in the table, seek professional help.
- » Ask your glove supplier to provide gloves options based on the information you supply in the table.
- » Select the right gloves from the options available – this is your responsibility.
- » Use gloves as recommended.
- » Train employees in the correct use and storage.

What should I avoid?

- » Immersing even gloved hands in chemicals.
- » Using glove material that is incompatible with the hazardous substance.
- » Using the wrong size and length of glove.
- » Using damaged or internally contaminated gloves.
- » Wearing gloves beyond their useful lifetime.
- » Storing gloves on contaminated surfaces.
- » Incorrect removal of used gloves.

Where can I get help?

- » Scottish Centre for Healthy Working Lives, tel: 0800 019 2211 or www.healthyworkinglives.com
- » Health and Safety Executive, www.hse.gov.uk/skin

For further details see 'Where to get extra help and support' on pages 83–88.

What you need to know to select the right gloves

Task or job for which gloves are needed (e.g. handling degreased items, washing salad, painting)	Write task here:			
Chemicals in products (get an up-to-date safety data sheet from your product supplier) or substances created at work (e.g. welding fumes, wood dust) or natural substances used (e.g. enzymes, wet work).	(If you do not know or are unsure, seek professional help)			
What is the physical form of the product?	Gas	Liquid	Dust	
	Paste	Oily	Other	
If a solid, how dusty is it? High – fine powder/dust cloud in air Medium – crystalline materials Low – pellets, pill-like or waxy/sticky, greasy	High	Medium	Low	
	(If you do not know, or are unsure, seek professional help)			
If liquid, what is its boiling point?	°C	Water based		
What is the physical form of the product?	Oily	Sticky	Water-based	
What temperature is the product used at?	Room temperature		°C	
Does the task or job create: (mark all that apply and write down exact details of the type of gas, vapour, metal fumes, dust, mist, spray or smoke created)	Gas	Vapour	Metal fumes	
	Dust	Mist	Spray	
	Smoke	Oil		
	Other			
(If unsure, seek professional help)				
How long does the task take? (e.g. spraying a car, 20 minutes; welding a pipe, 10 minutes; cleaning a surface, 30 minutes; sanding a wood panel, 10 minutes; cutting stone, 5 minutes)	Hours	Minutes		

How long will the gloves be worn before they are taken off for a break or rest?	Less than 1 hour	More than 1 hour	
How many times a day is the task performed?	times		
What is the total number of hours of glove use each day?	hours		
How do the hands come into contact with the product?	Dipping	Splashing	
	Touching	All three	
How far do the chemicals and contamination reach?	Hands	Forearms	
	Above elbows		
Are there other hazards associated with the task?	Hot	Cold	Sharps
	Abrasive	Electric shock	Moving parts
	Others		
What are the touch and grip requirements?	Fine work	High grip needed	
Important What size range is needed to meet the needs of wearers?	6	7	
	8	9	
	10	11	
Do any of the gloves wearers have any existing skin problems?	Yes	No	
Are fine inner gloves needed for continuous glove wear (e.g. when gloves are worn continuously for more than 1 hour)?	Yes	No	