

We handle harmful substances. It's a part of the job.

But by exposing our hands and forearms to the elements and corrosive and toxic substances, we could be bringing on dermatitis. It can take years to develop but stay with you for life. The most common form in the construction industry is contact dermatitis. It can take two forms: irritant contact dermatitis and allergic contact dermatitis.

Irritant contact dermatitis is a local inflammation of the skin and can develop after a brief, single exposure (acute) to a strong irritant, or be due to repeated and prolonged exposure (chronic) to a hazardous substance.

Allergic contact dermatitis occurs when someone becomes allergic to something that comes into contact with their skin. The allergic reaction can appear hours or days later. Once the allergy has developed, subsequent contact with even tiny amounts of the material can trigger an allergic reaction.

Wear gloves, distance yourself from harmful substances, clean up your hands properly and keep them in good order.

Here are some basic facts about skin care, the problems caused by not looking after your skin, how to spot early signs of dermatitis, manage the risks and keep yourself protected and safe.

Be comfortable in your skin.

Skin. It's the largest organ in your body and your armour against harmful substances, injury, infections, moisture loss and harmful UV radiation. It keeps your body temperature regulated and produces vitamin D.

All the more reason to read on: find out how your skin could be at risk and how to protect yourself.

Don't let illness into your body.

You might think yours is pretty thick, but many of the materials we use can not only damage your skin but pass straight through it and cause diseases and problems elsewhere in the body. What gets in through your skin could cause bladder or scrotal cancers, or lead to diseases of the kidney, heart, circulatory or nervous system.







Still think wearing gloves is for wusses?

Often the first sign of a problem can be 'local effects' in the area of contact, such as itchiness, dryness and redness of the skin, which can develop into flaking, scaling, cracks, swelling and blisters. As well as being an early warning sign, dermatitis is a serious problem itself. It can be very painful, affect your social life and prevent you from being able to work.

Once you get it you may be stuck with it, for life.







What substances should you be careful with?

All of these substances can have a corrosive or irritant effect that can lead to different types of dermatitis:

-  **Wet cement**
-  **Oils and greases**
-  **Solvents used in some paints**
-  **Strong acids and alkalis**
-  **Spirit based substances**
-  **Degreasers, descalers and detergents**



How do you avoid damaging your skin and health?

Dealing with all sorts of hazardous substances and the elements is a part of the job, but there are ways of managing and avoiding the risks. Wearing long sleeved work clothes and suitably strong and well fitting gloves is obvious, but here are some others:

-  Substitute or replace the substance with something less harmful. For example, replace solvent based products with water based, or powdered forms with granulated or liquid forms.
-  Maintain a safe working distance (SWD) by using long handled tools, tongs or scoops.
-  Use mild soap and warm water to wash and clean up soiled hands; particularly before eating and drinking, and before and after wearing gloves.
-  Dry hands thoroughly after washing, and protect the skin by moisturising your hands regularly. Apply a barrier cream on your hands, while at work.
-  Make sure you know what type of gloves to wear for the task in hand, how to look after them, how to put them on and take them off without contaminating the skin and how to dispose of them safely.
-  Keep an eye on your skin and look for tell tale early signs of dermatitis, and report any problems to your manager or supervisor.

What to do if you are exposed to harmful substances.

It happens. The gloves split or you get 'stuck in' to get the job done. Then you realise you've contaminated your skin. Here are a few immediate steps that can save you from lasting damage:

-  Accidental contamination should be immediately washed away with specialist cleaner if required, warm water and then thoroughly dried.
-  At the end of a shift make sure you wash exposed areas, dry thoroughly and use a basic moisturiser as this replaces the natural oils.

You only get one pair - look after them.

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Are your
hands screaming
a warning?


everyone
home safe
every day