

Protecting Your Hands Fact Sheet for Health Care Providers

This fact sheet can be used to help you assess and identify skin problems on your hands so that you can be proactive in protecting your hands from skin breakdown. It will help you identify what causes irritation to hands so that you can take the necessary actions to keep your hands healthy.

Why is hand care assessment important?

Maintaining the skin integrity of your hands is a safety issue for both you and the patient* as non-intact hands harbour an increased number of organisms. It is very important to have healthy hands with intact skin that is free of irritation at all times.

Steps to keep your hands healthy

1. Review the *Just Clean Your Hands (JCYH)* Hand Care Program booklet. You will learn that consistently using the correct hand hygiene technique, selecting the right products and protecting your hands is a 24-hour/7-day-a-week commitment.
2. Review this fact sheet to learn what practices might cause irritation to your hands and suggestions on how to maintain healthy hands.
3. Verify that you clean your hands correctly in order to maintain healthy hands. Have you received workplace training on how to protect and care for your skin? It is important for you to evaluate whether you are using the correct technique in hand washing to decrease irritation to hands. Know what hand care products to use to avoid skin breakdown and irritation. Note: Alcohol-Based Hand Rub (ABHR) is known to be easier on hands than hand washing, so the preferred method of cleaning hands when not visibly soiled is to use ABHR.
 - a. Review the technique tips on page 4 of the *JCYH* Hand Care Program booklet.
 - b. Watch the *JCYH* DVD for health care professionals on “How to hand wash” and “How to handrub.”
 - c. Public Health Ontario offers online learning in infection prevention and control. For hand hygiene, review the IPAC Core Competencies course, specifically the Health Care Provider Controls module.
 - d. For more information, please contact handhygiene@oahpp.ca or visit publichealthontario.ca/JCYH.
4. If you have concerns about your hand skin integrity, Occupational Health will assist in developing a program for you to prevent hand skin irritation.



*In this document, the term patient refers to client/patient/resident.



Did you know?

1. Common irritants to skin health (not all inclusive)

- a. Detergents (soaps)
- b. Hot water
- c. Wet work
- d. Low relative humidity
- e. Failure to use lotion/cream
- f. Not drying hands before donning gloves
- g. Powdered gloves
- h. Rubber and latex gloves
- i. Quality of paper towels
- j. Shear forces associated with wearing or removing gloves
- k. Use of traditional surgical scrub brushes and surgical scrub times over recommended time
- l. Nickel sulfate (e.g., found in jewellery)

2. The skin on hands can be adversely affected by many factors

Some examples to consider are:

- Certain climate conditions, such as dry, humid, cold or hot conditions (e.g., not wearing gloves in the winter can increase hand dryness and irritation)
- Hands frequently in water and detergents
- A history or work involving “wet work” or “wet gloves”
- A chronic or recurrent skin condition, such as eczema, psoriasis or hives
- Some allergies (e.g., fragrances, preservatives)
- Smoking outside in dry, cold conditions
- Gardening
- Mechanics (e.g., where chemicals are used)
- Taking care of small children due to frequent changing of diapers, bathing and cleaning up of children
- Incorrect technique when cleaning hands
- Lack of frequently moisturizing hands

3. Protecting hands is a 24-hour/7-day-a-week consideration

Protect hands from chemicals and extreme conditions at home and work:

- Avoid chemicals on skin that may cause reactions, such as gluteraldehydes, theiram, and nickel found in jewellery.
- Take care when doing work at home to use protective gloves when indicated and use moisturizers frequently (e.g., for dishwashing; when going outside in the winter or any time there is low relative humidity).

Sample of general hand care instructions

1. At work, use Alcohol-Based Hand Rub (ABHR) for hand hygiene when hands are not visibly soiled. Many studies have shown that ABHR is better tolerated than soap and water.
2. When washing hands use lukewarm water and unscented irritant-free soap or hand cleanser.
3. Remove rings when cleaning hands as cleaning product can be caught under rings, which can cause dermatitis to flare.
4. Rinse hands thoroughly and pat hands dry.
5. Protective gloves should be intact and clean and dry inside. Hands must be clean and dry when donning gloves.
6. Apply fragrance-free, non-irritating moisturizing cream dispensed in a bottle to hands frequently.
 - It is important to use a protective hand lotion/cream frequently during your work and at home to protect your hands from irritation caused by any of the factors listed above. The lotion must be compatible with the gloves, hand rub and hand washing soap used. Products are to be dispensed correctly to prevent contamination.
7. Avoid skin contact with detergents, strong cleaning agents, shampoos, various waxes and polishes, solvents and thinners.
8. Don't apply hair lotion, cream, gels or dyes with bare hands.
9. Continue hand protection for all gardening, cooking, cleaning, bathing and childcare duties.
10. Protect your hands from the dry cold. Wear mitts or gloves at all times when in the cold. Even one minute of unprotected cold exposure may dry out hands. Be sure to wear gloves/mitts when handling a cold steering wheel.
11. Avoid irritants and allergens.

Reference:

Adapted from Contact Dermatitis Clinic General Hand Care Instructions, St Michael's Hospital, Toronto, Ontario.

Your Hand Care Assessment Tool

These questions can be used for assessing your hand hygiene practices and identifying changes that might become the cause of hand irritation.

Evaluation of frequency of hand hygiene practices		
Average number of hours worked per week _____		
Hand cleaner (Please indicate all used)		
	Number of times/day	Number of months used
Alcohol-Based Hand Rub	_____	_____
Water and antimicrobial soap	_____	_____
Water and liquid/foam/gel non-antimicrobial soap	_____	_____
Water only	_____	_____
Brush	_____	_____
Antimicrobial sponge	_____	_____
How many times do you wash/cleanse your hands during a working day?		
<input type="checkbox"/> 0-5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6-10 <input type="checkbox"/> 11-20 <input type="checkbox"/> greater than 20		
Education		
Did you receive workplace training on how to protect and care for your skin? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		
Exposure assessment (gloves)		
Gloves (<i>indicate which glove types you use</i>):		
<input type="checkbox"/> Latex	<input type="checkbox"/> powdered	<input type="checkbox"/> non-powdered
<input type="checkbox"/> Vinyl	<input type="checkbox"/> powdered	<input type="checkbox"/> non-powdered
<input type="checkbox"/> Nitrile	<input type="checkbox"/> powdered	<input type="checkbox"/> non-powdered
<input type="checkbox"/> Glove liners	<input type="checkbox"/> powdered	<input type="checkbox"/> non-powdered
<input type="checkbox"/> Other, please specify: _____		
How many times during a working day do you put on gloves?		
<input type="checkbox"/> 0-5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6-10 <input type="checkbox"/> 11-20 <input type="checkbox"/> more than 20 times		
During a working day, is the total time you wear gloves:		
<input type="checkbox"/> less than 1 hour? <input type="checkbox"/> between 1 to 2 hours? <input type="checkbox"/> greater than 2 hours?		
Are your hands wet inside the gloves? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		

Hand product changes

Have there been any changes in the soap or hand products used at your workplace? Yes No

If yes, what? _____

Have you been exposed to any new products at your workplace? Yes No

(This could be chemicals or materials being used.)

If yes, list. _____

Has anything changed in your work recently that may impact the skin on your hands? Yes No

If yes, what? _____

Do your hands improve after being away from work? Yes No

(i.e., improve on days off and get worse when working)

Have you changed any personal care products at home, such as soap, lotions, sunscreen, laundry detergent/softening agents, etc.?
 Yes No

If yes, list. _____

Have you done anything different outside of work recently that may impact the skin on your hands? Yes No

(e.g., yard work, travel, hiking, contact with poison ivy)

If yes, what? _____

List any chemical exposures to hands, including cosmetic products that may be an irritant:

After completing this review, identify changes that will assist in improving the skin integrity of your hands to keep them healthy:

Evaluation of skin condition

Self-assessment of the skin on hands:

Appearance (*supple, red, blotchy, rash*)

Abnormal --- --- --- Normal

Intactness (*cracks, open areas*)

Abnormal --- --- --- Normal

Moisture content (*dryness*)

Abnormal --- --- --- Normal

Sensation (*itchy, burning, soreness*)

Abnormal --- --- --- Normal

How would you assess the overall health of the skin on your hands? Very altered --- --- --- Perfect

If you develop skin problems, irritations or cracks on your hands, it is recommended that you contact an Occupational Health Professional at your health facility for an assessment and recommendations on how to attain and maintain healthy hands.