



Preventing Dermatitis in the Hairdressing and Beauty Industry



A Guide for Employers





A recent study of British hairdressers by the Health and Safety Executive estimated that over 45% (approximately 50 000) of hairdressers suffer from dermatitis?

Virtually every salon employer either suffers from or knows of someone in the industry who suffers from dermatitis.



What is Dermatitis?

Dermatitis is an inflammatory condition of the skin. It can vary in severity. Dermatitis is not infectious, so it cannot be passed from one person to another but it is unsightly and uncomfortable. Also, it does not look good from a customer's point of view and as such a large number of hairdressers are forced to leave the profession.

Work related dermatitis is usually contact dermatitis, which is a disease resulting from skin coming into contact with something which causes an adverse reaction. This can be chemical (including 'wet work'), biological or physical in nature. There are two types of contact dermatitis associated with skin exposure to chemicals: Irritant contact dermatitis and allergic contact dermatitis. The signs of contact dermatitis include redness, swelling, blistering, flaking and cracking. It can lead to itching, bleeding and puss formation.

Irritant contact dermatitis

Irritant contact dermatitis is a local inflammation of the skin. It can develop after a short heavy single exposure (acute) or be due to





repeated and prolonged exposure (chronic) to the hazardous agent. In some cases, more than one agent will be involved, for example water and detergents. The irritant action of a chemical depends on its ability to cause changes to the outside layer of the skin. Some substances can remove skin oils, fats and moisture from the surface. This reduces the protective action of the skin and increases the ability of the irritant substance to get in to the skin.

Allergic contact dermatitis

Allergic contact dermatitis develops in stages. The allergic reaction begins with a process called sensitisation. Sensitisation starts when an allergic substance (e.g. nickel in ear piercing fittings and money) penetrates the skin. This provokes a number of immunological responses that can last from four days to three weeks. When a sensitised person is re-exposed to the allergenic substance, white blood cells recognise it and react to protect the body. But they also release chemicals called lymphokines. These cause itching, pain, redness, swelling and blisters on the skin. Once sensitised, the allergic reaction is likely to affect the person for the rest of their life. If further contact is prevented, the level of sensitivity may gradually decline.

Who does it affect?

Younger, inexperienced and inadequately trained workers have a higher prevalence of occupational skin disorders than older ones. However, older workers may be prone to chronic skin irritation because their skin is usually drier.

Women usually report fewer occurrences of dermatitis than men; this could be because of better hygiene practices and less exposures to toxic substances. However, women are usually more easily sensitised.

What can I do to prevent my staff getting Dermatitis?

Simple control measures for Hairdressers

- Wear 'single use' (type to be specified) gloves when using hairdressing products (e.g. shampoo, dyes, bleaches) and for work with hands in water.
- Moisturise – apply hand cream before starting work and each time you wash your hands.
- Dry your hands thoroughly after washing using a soft cotton or paper towel.





- Throw away 'single use' gloves every time you take them off. Change them between clients.



Simple control measures for Nail technicians

- A specially ventilated table is recommended for all nail work.
- Wear 'single use' nitrile gloves for nail sculpture and nail product use.
- Moisturise – apply hand cream before starting work and each time you wash your hands.
- Throw away 'single use' gloves every time you take them off. Change them between clients.

What else should I do?

You should also arrange for suitable health surveillance under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations where:

- there is exposure to 'wet work' and/or substances known to cause dermatitis and
- there is a reasonable likelihood that the working procedures in place would lead to dermatitis.

You can do this by appointing someone who is capable of identifying dermatitis and get them to check all your employees' hands on a regular basis. These checks should be recorded in some way and if dermatitis is found then medical help needs to be sought.

Further information

There is an independent service called 'Workplace Health Connect'. It provides free and impartial advice on health at work in partnership with HSE. It is a confidential service, free service to small businesses in England and Wales with an advice line (0845 609 6006).

If you require this in a different format or language, please contact the Licensing Team on 01803 208126 or at Licensing@torbay.gov.uk

