

Hand Dermatitis: What You Need To Know

Hand Dermatitis

Hand dermatitis (also known as contact dermatitis) is a common irritation or inflammation of the skin.

You are at a higher risk for developing hand dermatitis if you or a close member of your family (parent, sibling or child) has:

- hand dermatitis
- eczema (dry, itchy rash)
- allergies.

Causes

Hand dermatitis may occur when your hands come in contact with a substance:

- that irritates your skin
- to which you have an allergy.

Some common substances that cause hand dermatitis include bleach, rubbing alcohol, deodorants, body washes and perfumes.

Signs and Symptoms

Symptoms appear on your hands. They may include one or more of the following:

- itchy rash
- itchy, red, swollen skin (hives)
- dry, flaky skin
- blisters.

Treatment

Protecting and taking care of your skin may help treat hand dermatitis and prevent it from occurring again.

Use the following steps to treat and prevent hand dermatitis.

- Stay away from irritants or allergens that cause your hand dermatitis. Do not let your hands be wet for long periods of time because this may irritate your skin.

If this is not possible, wear cloth, rubber or neoprene gloves at these times. Make sure your hands are dry before putting on gloves. Moisture (water, sweat) between your skin and the gloves may increase skin irritation.

- Use a moisturizer (lotion, heavy cream) regularly on your hands. There are many different types of moisturizers. Look for fragrance-free moisturizers that contain oil.
 - While you are awake, apply moisturizer to your hands at least every hour.
 - Before you go to sleep, put moisturizer on your hands and then wear cotton gloves overnight.
- Wash your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub instead of soap and water if possible. This may cause less skin irritation and dry skin than using soap and water.

- Only wash your hands with soap and water when needed. For example, this includes times when you have a buildup of alcohol-based hand rub or you can see that your hands need washing.

To help limit skin irritation:

- use warm (not hot) or cool water
 - use hand soaps that are labeled as mild or fragrance-free
 - make sure you rinse all the soap off your skin
 - gently pat your skin dry (Do not rub your hands with paper towels.)
 - put moisturizer on your hands within 3 minutes after washing
 - be sure your hands are completely dry before putting on gloves.
- If you work in health care, you must use employer-approved hand products while at work.
 - Wear warm mittens or gloves when you are outside during cold weather. Cold weather may increase skin irritation and dry skin.

- Do not wear rings, or remove them before getting your hands wet. Moisture or soap between your skin and the rings may increase skin irritation.

It may take about 4 months of treatment before your skin returns to normal. Hand dermatitis may occur again if you stop treatment.

Skin Splits (Fissures)

Hand dermatitis may cause painful splits (fissures) in your skin. These splits can become infected or bleed.

To help prevent infection and bleeding:

- put an antibiotic ointment on the split
- seal the split using a liquid bandage or skin-safe adhesive.

Whom to Call With Questions

Call your health care provider if you have questions.