

Symptoms

Many workers in the United States are exposed to a skin irritant in one form or another.

Employees may experience symptoms such as:

Symptoms		
Mild	Moderate	Severe
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ reddening of the skin■ itching	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ raised, red rash■ fierce itching	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ open sores■ swelling

Know what do to when symptoms occur

If you should experience a reaction to any substance in the work place, do the following:

1. Advise your immediate supervisor or designated first aid person
2. Quickly flush the affected area using large amounts of cool water. (Warm or hot water encourages skin pores to open and allows more of the irritant to be absorbed.) Be careful to use a soap to which you have not previously shown any sensitivity
3. Search your work area for the source of the skin irritant or sensitizer
4. Quickly have the area cleansed to prevent further injury to you or others

Causes

The agents that can cause industrial dermatitis are grouped into four major categories:

Allergic sensitizers

Allergic sensitizers, also known as chemical hypersensitivity, are chemicals to which a person has become allergic after repeated exposure to a particular chemical. Some common examples are:

- formaldehyde
- poison ivy
- epoxy resin hardeners

Mechanical trauma

Mechanical trauma dermatitis can be caused by:

- friction

- pressure
- abrasions
- wounds
- bruises caused by trauma
- foreign bodies such as glass fiber getting in the skin

Photosensitizers

Photosensitizers are chemicals which only react when a light source, typically ultraviolet light, is available.

Primary irritants

A primary irritant will cause damage or contact dermatitis if sufficient exposure is allowed to occur. Typical primary irritants are:

- mineral acids
- alkalis

How to Investigate

Any occupational skin disease investigation should document the worker's degree of:

- perspiration
- personal hygiene
- pre-existing conditions and allergies
- diet
- general state of health

How to Prevent

As with anything, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Limit industrial dermatitis by:

- Wash skin frequently
- Avoid contact with skin irritants
- Wear protective gear when appropriate
- Ensure clothing is:
 - ◆ properly designed
 - ◆ appropriately worn
 - ◆ well-maintained

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