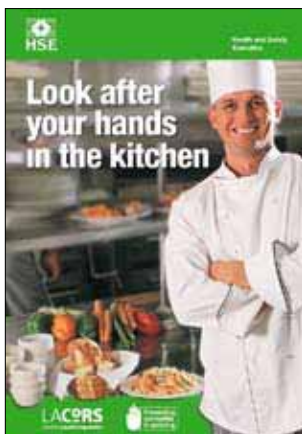


Look after your hands in the kitchen



*This is a web-friendly version
of leaflet Misc762*

This leaflet is for small catering businesses. It gives basic information on work-related contact dermatitis and what you, as an employer, can do to prevent it happening at your business.

Does this concern me?

Yes, it concerns you if:

- your business prepares/handles a lot of food;
- your employees have to wash their hands a lot during the day to meet food safety laws;
- you have employees who clean kitchen surfaces, pots and pans and kitchen utensils.

What is work-related contact dermatitis?

It is a skin disease caused by work. You may have heard it called eczema. The skin's surface forms a protective layer and work-related contact dermatitis happens when this protective layer is damaged. It can lead to sore, cracked, painful skin that can be bad enough to keep people off work. It is most common on the hands and forearms.

The things that cause work-related dermatitis in catering businesses are a lot of contact with water, soaps and cleaning products (ie washing-up, washing food, hand washing), and even contact with some foods (contact with some foods can cause 'allergic' dermatitis).

Why is this a problem for my catering business?

Work-related contact dermatitis is one of the main causes of ill health for catering staff (chefs, cooks and catering assistants). The number of new cases per year is twice the average of all other industries.

If one of your catering staff had to leave their job because they developed a bad case of work-related contact dermatitis that couldn't be cured, what effect would that have on your business? Remember that work-related ill health can cost more than twice as much as an accident causing injury. Could you afford this?

What can I do?

The good thing is that work related contact dermatitis is easy to prevent and should not cost a lot. You just have to think '**APC**':

- **Avoid** direct contact with cleaning products, water and food where this is possible and sensible – for instance use a dishwasher rather than washing up by hand, use tools such as tongs to handle food rather than hands. You may already be doing this, as these are also good food safety techniques.
- **Protect** the skin. Avoiding contact will not always be possible so wear non-latex gloves where you can and particularly when cleaning. Information on what type of gloves to wear will be supplied with the cleaning products. Where you wear gloves for handling food, remember your food safety training. Also protect the skin by moisturising* as often as possible – this replaces the natural oils that help keep the skin's protective barrier working properly.
- **Check** hands regularly for the first signs of dermatitis – itchy, dry or red skin. When dermatitis is spotted early, it can be treated, which can stop it from getting too bad.

* Use appropriate creams that will not contaminate food or cause cross contamination, eg from a dispenser, hypoallergenic, fragrance free and nut oil free.

What law applies?

The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (COSHH) (as amended).

How and where can I get more help?

HSE website – a range of free information including further free downloadable guidance on COSHH and work-related contact dermatitis: www.hse.gov.uk/skin.

E-COSHH essentials – a free website that helps you do your COSHH risk assessment: www.coshh-essentials.org.uk.

Workplace Health Connect – for free practical advice on health, safety and return to work issues, please contact Workplace Health Connect Tel: 0845 609 6006 website: www.workplacehealthconnect.co.uk.

For information about health and safety ring HSE's Infoline Tel: 0845 345 0055 Fax: 0845 408 9566 Textphone: 0845 408 9577 e-mail: hse.infoline@natbrit.com or write to HSE Information Services, Caerphilly Business Park, Caerphilly CF83 3GG.

This leaflet contains notes on good practice which are not compulsory but which you may find helpful in considering what you need to do.