

G403

COSHH essentials: General guidance



This information will help employers (including the self-employed) comply with the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (COSHH), as amended, to control exposure and protect workers' health.

It is also useful for trade union safety representatives.

The sheet describes specialist advice on health surveillance for occupational skin disease, which includes dermatitis. It applies to certain processes, and whenever a product is labelled R43 'May cause sensitisation by skin contact'.

It sets out what you should expect from a health surveillance provider.

Tell your occupational health professional, or if appropriate, your designated responsible person if workers have any of the following symptoms:

- skin redness or soreness;
- itching;
- rash; or
- skin cracking or peeling.

Check all skin likely to come into contact with chemicals, including hands, forearms, legs, and face.

Health surveillance for occupational dermatitis

Control approach 4 Special

Introduction

- ✓ Occupational skin disease is important and a common health problem. Repeated skin irritation or skin sensitisation can lead to dermatitis.
- ✓ If you detect the signs of dermatitis early enough, and reduce workers' exposure to the substances responsible, you will reduce or cure the disease. But if left untreated, dermatitis can become irreversible. If skin becomes sensitised, a small amount can trigger a bad reaction.

Substances

- ✓ Epoxy resins, latex, rubber chemicals, soaps and cleaners, metalworking fluids, cement, wet work, enzymes and wood can all cause dermatitis. Corrosive and irritating chemicals also lead to dermatitis. Solvents on the skin make other chemicals more likely to cause skin damage.

Occupations

- ✓ Construction work, health service work, rubber making, printing, paint spraying, agriculture, horticulture, electroplating, cleaning, catering, hairdressing and florists are all associated with dermatitis.

Wet-work

- ✓ Hand immersion, particularly multiple short-term immersion using soap or detergent, is associated with dermatitis.

Planning and preparation

- ✓ Plan what you are going to do if a worker shows signs of occupational dermatitis and make sure your employees are aware of your plans

What is health surveillance?

- ✓ Health surveillance is collecting and using information about workers' health, related to the substances they use. It helps prevent the development of dermatitis by detecting the early signs.
- ✓ Health surveillance is **never** an alternative to the proper control of exposure. It is not the same as health screening or health promotion.
- ✓ You should consider skin surveillance if workers:

- use substances or are in occupations listed above; or
- are working with products labelled R43 'May cause sensitisation by skin contact', or R42/43 'May cause sensitisation by inhalation and skin contact'.

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- ✓ Involve a health professional (doctor or nurse) in your health surveillance programme, they will help develop your scheme and train a responsible person, or could provide a service - see 'Useful links'.
 - ✓ Health surveillance could include the following measures:
 - Assess workers' skin condition as soon as possible after they start a relevant job to provide a baseline (eg within six weeks).
 - Introduce regular testing - every few months or annually - as advised by the health professional. This could involve a questionnaire and skin inspection (hands, forearms and, if these can be contaminated, lower legs).
 - Your health provider should interpret the results and identify any need to revise the risk assessment.
 - You should appoint a responsible person, supported by the health professional, to report any symptoms that occur between tests.
 - Keep a health record, and encourage workers to keep a copy of their results in case they change jobs.

What is it likely to cost?

- ✓ Skin surveillance at your workplace costs an estimated £20 to set up and £20 per person per test using a health professional.

Record keeping

- ✓ Record:
 - the activity that can cause dermatitis;
 - worker's name, address and National Insurance number;
 - products or process they work on, and how often;
 - protective measures provided;
 - date of starting work with the product or process; and
 - the result of skin inspection.

Useful links

- For information about health and safety ring HSE's Infoline Tel: 0845 345 0055 Textphone: 0845 408 9577 e-mail: hse.infoline@natbrit.com.
- Look in the Yellow Pages under 'Health and safety consultants' and 'Health authorities and services' for 'occupational health'.
- Also see www.nhsplus.nhs.uk.

This guidance is issued by the Health and Safety Executive. Following the guidance is not compulsory and you are free to take other action. But if you do follow the guidance you will normally be doing enough to comply with the law. Health and safety inspectors seek to secure compliance with the law and may refer to this guidance as illustrating good practice.