

## Hand Care Advice

Repeated exposure to water and use of soap, alcohol hand gel, and other detergents can cause dry skin, and what is known as irritant contact dermatitis – a form of eczema.

Irritant contact dermatitis can cause the skin to itch, become sore and red, and develop small blisters or painful cracks (fissures). If you already have dry skin either from a skin condition, from medication (such as isotretinoin) or because you are washing your hands more than normal then you may be particularly susceptible to this.

### **Hand management tips:**

Here are some tips on minimising the impact of frequent handwashing on the skin:

- Wash hands in line with government guidance, using soap and water. This can be difficult for people with dry and cracked skin, but we advise to follow the government guidance as much as is practical.
- Dry your hands fully after washing by patting them dry, not rubbing.
- Moisturisers (emollients) are an essential part of treating hand dermatitis. They help repair the damaged outer skin and lock moisture inside the skin making it soft and supple again. They should be applied generously after handwashing, repeatedly through the day, and whenever the skin feels dry.
- Some people find overnight moisturising treatments beneficial. Apply a generous layer of a plain moisturiser just before you go to bed, then put on a pair of clean cotton gloves and leave overnight.
- When the hands are going to come into contact with water or detergents, but when not specifically washing the hands (such as when washing up, shampooing a child's hair, or using cleaning products), wearing gloves that provide a barrier (such as nitrile gloves which are available from chemists or from online stores) will help to keep the skin's barrier intact.

### **Severe hand dermatitis:**

If you have severe hand dermatitis or suspect an infection (for example, your skin is oozing sometimes with golden crusting) you may need to see your GP, occupational health or dermatology.

You may need prescription treatments to reduce inflammation.

This could be either topical steroids or in more severe cases occasionally oral antibiotics if there is definite evidence of infection.