



# Hand Dermatitis & Foodservice Gloves

## What is Hand Dermatitis?

Hand dermatitis, or hand eczema, is a common skin condition affecting up to 10% of the population.<sup>1</sup> It is a non-contagious condition that results from a combination of factors, including a person's genetic makeup and external factors such as contact with irritants and allergens (e.g. chemicals). Because of the irritant nature of some chemicals, hand dermatitis is particularly common in people with jobs involving foodservice, cleaning, hairdressing, healthcare, and mechanical work. In some individuals it may also be seasonal, during the colder months when the air is cool and dry.

## Symptoms

The main symptoms of hand dermatitis include one or more of the following:

- Redness
- Itching
- Pain
- Dryness, to the point of peeling and flaking
- Cracks
- Blisters

## Diagnosis

It is important to seek a medical diagnosis from a physician or dermatologist. There are 2 types of hand dermatitis, irritant and allergic, and it will be important to determine which type is present. The problem can then be addressed by changing or eliminating certain environmental factors.

## Causes

Irritant dermatitis can be caused by water, soaps, detergents, solvents, degreasers, lubricants, oils, coolants, fiberglass dust, food products, metals, and plastics can inhibit the repair of the skin barrier. Common causes of allergic dermatitis are antibacterial soaps and solutions, organic dyes, rubber, plastic resins, and plants.<sup>2</sup>

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Sometimes it is assumed that disposable foodservice gloves may be the cause of hand dermatitis, however, there are numerous other irritants at home and at work that come into contact with the hands.

The majority of dermatitis cases in the foodservice industry are NOT caused by glove use, but rather from prolonged contact with soaps, detergents, cleaning chemicals, water, and by direct contact with various food items, such as spices, nuts, hot peppers, and onions, among others. In fact, wearing gloves can actually help to prevent hand dermatitis, by providing a barrier against the offending irritants.

## Prevention and Management

Following hand-protective strategies, both at work and at home, can help to prevent or improve hand dermatitis. One important hand-protective strategy for foodservice workers is proper glove usage.



### Proper Glove Usage - Important for Hand Health (and Food Safety)

- High quality disposable gloves should be chosen for food handling
- Non-latex gloves are recommended (safeguard against latex allergies)
- Gloves should fit properly - never too tight, allowing for air circulation
- Gloves should be task-specific - never wear 100% of the time
- Change gloves frequently
- Wash and dry hands thoroughly before and after the use of gloves - both for food safety and to keep the pores of the skin open (to help maintain healthy skin)
- Use a mild soap for hand washing, as harsh soaps, detergents, and sanitizers (alcohol-based) can dry the skin of the hands, causing redness, drying and cracking. Because many soaps and detergents are specifically designed to break down grease and oil, they can also break down the layer of natural oil on the hands. This natural oil provides a protective barrier and keeps the skin moist and healthy.
- Have SOPs in place for hand hygiene and glove use in the workplace

Following the above guidelines can help to ensure safety and hand protection from irritants.

#### References:

1. National Eczema Association website: [www.nationaleczema.org](http://www.nationaleczema.org),
2. The Eczema Society of Canada website: [www.eczemahelp.ca](http://www.eczemahelp.ca)