



Royal College  
of Nursing

# Are you glove aware?



# Be glove aware

It is important to assess when to use gloves and what type of glove to use.

Over or under use of gloves can put you at risk of work-related contact dermatitis. Patients can also be put at risk from infection as the wearing of gloves can prevent effective hand hygiene.

Before carrying out a task, it's crucial to ask the following questions to decide if a glove is needed, and which type of glove to wear:

- What task am I performing?
- Is there a high risk I may come into contact with blood/body fluids, non-intact skin or mucous membranes (e.g. nose, mouth or eyes)?
- Will I be in contact with chemicals (e.g. disinfectants or harmful substances such as cytotoxic drugs)?
- What glove size do I need?
- If I do need a glove, what kind do I need?
- Does my organisation have a policy on creating a latex-free environment?

Gloves are **single use items** – they must be removed and changed between each patient or care task.





## Gloves on?

- When in contact with blood/body fluid, non-intact skin, or mucous membranes.
- When in contact with chemical hazards such as disinfectants, preserving agents or cytotoxic drugs.
- Only when hands are thoroughly dry (post-hand washing or alcohol rub) to reduce risk of dermatitis.



## Gloves off?

- As soon as gloves are suspected to be damaged.
- When no longer in contact with blood/body fluids, non-intact skin or mucous membranes.
- When a single aspect of patient care/treatment has ended (e.g. gloves may be required to empty a urinary catheter before providing mouth care).
- When it's necessary to carry out effective hand hygiene.
- When contact with chemicals has ended.

# Be skin aware

## No risk - no glove!

Approximately 1,000 health care workers develop work-related contact dermatitis every year (HSE, 2012).

Damaged or non-intact skin on the hands places both the patient and the health worker at risk because it prevents effective hand hygiene.

Follow these simple steps to prevent and manage work-related contact dermatitis:

- Ensure you use a good hand hygiene and drying technique.
- Avoid direct contact between unprotected hands and hazardous substances.
- Regularly apply hand moisturisers.
- Check skin regularly for the first signs of itchy, dry or red skin.
- Remember wearing gloves is not an alternative to carrying out effective hand hygiene procedures.

If you are having problems with the skin on your hands, seek help and advice from either your occupational health service or your GP at the earliest opportunity.



*Fig 1: Dry, itchy, red skin - early warning signs of contact dermatitis*

\* In the UK, wet work is defined as work that involves hands being wet for significant periods during the working day; as a guide – more than two hours a day or about twenty hand washes a day (HSE, 2016)

# Top tips for hand hygiene

## Prevention and management of work-related contact dermatitis

- Gloves are not a substitute for hand hygiene.
- **Always** wet hands thoroughly before applying soap.
- Wash hands with soap and water when visibly dirty or obviously soiled with blood or other body fluids.
- Wash hands with soap and water where alcohol hand rubs are known to be less effective such as when caring for patients with known or suspected *Clostridium difficile* or norovirus infections.
- Wash hands with soap and water if alcohol-based hand rub is not available. Hand wipes may be helpful in community settings.
- Use an alcohol-based hand rub as the preferred means of routine hand hygiene in all other clinical situations.

(Adapted from WHO, 2009)

## References

Health and Safety Executive (2018) *Dermatitis in Health and Social Care* [www.hse.gov.uk/healthservices/dermatitis.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/healthservices/dermatitis.htm) accessed 29 March 2018.

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