



# PARTNER UPDATE

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## WORK PARTNERS

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH SPECIALISTS

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July 2017

## Occupational Skin Disease

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Occupational skin disease is more common than one may think. It can strike an employee in a variety of settings from healthcare to housekeeping. The most common occupational skin disease is contact dermatitis.

Contact dermatitis is caused by contact with something that irritates the skin or causes an allergic response. Therefore, this further divides it into either irritant or allergic dermatitis, an example of each being exposure to industrial cleaning solution and poison oak, respectively.

These two types can often be hard to distinguish; however, allergic dermatitis can occur in places on the body that did not come in direct contact with the offending agent due to the immune response, and irritant dermatitis typically develops slowly due to prolonged exposure. Contact dermatitis rash is red in appearance, often with swelling or scaling, associated with itching, and is clearly demarcated at the exposed sites.

Upon interview of the injured worker questions should be asked about the exact time relationship between skin condition and the work exposure, including effects of rash during time off and when returning to work. The clinician should cover: general work conditions, specific work activities that involve skin contact with potential offending agents, Material Safety and Data Sheets if specific product is involved, presence of rash in colleagues, control measures or personal protective equipment in place, and routine work hygiene. Additionally, provider should inquire about any other potential exposures outside of work including but not limited to lotions, soaps, detergents, household cleaning supplies, hobbies, gym use, medications, and any history of allergies or rashes in the past. If these questions are addressed it will allow to provider to determine if it is more probable than not that the rash is arising out of the course of employment.

The first step in the treatment is removal from the offending agent. In office the provider will assess the severity of the rash and likely prescribe corticosteroids, such as hydrocortisone cream. Corticosteroids are used to reduce signs and symptoms of inflammation. Corticosteroids come in various strengths and routes all to which will be determined based off severity and location. More often than not the patient has already tried over the counter management without relief, so a prescription strength topical corticosteroid would be the next course of treatment for a focal rash. When the rash is widespread oral steroids or intramuscular injections are often indicated. Over the

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counter Benadryl, emollients/moisturizers, oatmeal baths and calamine lotion are all helpful for healing and management of associated itching.

As with all occupational injuries or illnesses prevention remains the most important part of treatment. It is imperative that employers equip their employees with the appropriate protection, such as, gloves, mask, gowns, proper hand washing, etc.

### **WorkPartners Occupational Health Specialists**

Located in North San Diego County, WorkPartners clinics are full service Occupational Health clinics dedicated to supporting the health and wellness of local employees. Learn more at [www.WorkPartnersOHS.com](http://www.WorkPartnersOHS.com).

