

Dermatitis Screening Practices in the Health Care Sector

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Issue: Studies have shown that about one-quarter of health care workers (HCWs) have hand dermatitis, likely due to exposure to wet work (i.e. wearing gloves or having hands in water/liquids >2h per day and/or frequent hand washing). Although contact dermatitis can result in significant impairment and disability, better outcomes are possible through early detection and management. However there is little information available on how skin exposures are prevented, detected and managed in the health care sector.

Methods: The Centre for Research Expertise in Occupational Disease (CREOD) set out to (a) develop a HCW screening tool for hand dermatitis (included two phases of questionnaires and examination by occupational health nurses) and test it on HCWs in three health-care settings and (b) describe the current approaches to screening and education provided to HCWs in hospitals across the Greater Toronto Area (included an online survey of occupational health leaders and interviews with occupational health nurses at acute care hospitals).

Implications (see findings on right): The high proportion of HCW with hand dermatitis is concerning. **While screening programs are reported to be in place, the majority are conducted at hire or if the worker presents with dermatitis, likely failing to identify workers with early disease when intervention is most likely to be effective.** The absence of tracking is also a concern. The lack of integration between the Infection Prevention and Occupational Health departments suggests that **HCWs may be receiving inadequate training and/or conflicting information on the topic of skin protection and skin care education.**

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Findings:

- 72% of the 183 HCWs examined were found to have hand dermatitis.
- Risk factors included:
 - Working directly with patients
 - More frequent hand washing and use of gloves
 - Working longer in health care
 - Having a history of eczema
- HCWs found the tool easy to use.
- Interviews revealed that HCWs may not disclose their dermatitis for fear of being removed from frontline patient-care activities or having to do modified work that does not feel meaningful.
- 77% of hospitals reported having a standard screening protocol, however this was usually done only at hiring or when employees presented with skin concerns.
- None of the organizations tracked dermatitis rates.
- 59% of hospitals reported training new employees on dermatitis, usually as part of hand hygiene training. However participants identified a lack of integration between the Infection Prevention and Occupational Health departments, which they perceived as a barrier to early and effective prevention and treatment for hand dermatitis.
- Few workers' compensation claims were reported.

