

## *DERMATITIS*

Dermatitis is an inflammation of the skin from exposure an irritant. The degree of inflammation is affected by the type of skin (pigmentation, dryness, hairiness), age, sex, season of the year, history of previous skin disease or allergies, and personal hygiene.

Although one exposure to a substance may be enough to cause a skin reaction, workers can become sensitized through prolonged and repeated exposures to a substance. The delay can be as short as a day, but can be as long as several months.

- Generally, causes of dermatitis are chemical, mechanical, physical, or biological.
- Chemicals can produce reactions ranging from chemical burns to mild skin irritation.
- Mechanical causes of dermatitis include friction, pressure, and trauma resulting in abrasions, wounds, bruises, or foreign bodies (like glass fiber) getting into the skin.
- Physical agents that lead to dermatitis are excessive heat, cold, sunlight, ultraviolet light, X-rays or other ionizing radiation.
- Biological agents such as bacteria, viruses, fungi, poisonous plants, and insects can cause or complicate dermatitis.

Dermatitis is easier to prevent than to cure. What can you do? If possible, eliminate skin contact with irritating chemicals and substances or substitute less toxic and irritating ones. Use protective clothing and equipment including aprons, eye and face shields, finger cots, gloves, and chemical-resistant clothing, provided they are kept clean and in good repair. Make sure irritating materials are removed from all work clothing so they cannot be transported home.

Personal cleanliness is one of the best preventive measures against skin irritation and dermatitis. Workers should wash their hands often with a mild, non-abrasive soap solution, and they should wash any skin area right away if it's been exposed to an irritating substance. Protective creams, when used properly, provide limited protection.

Engineering controls, such as enclosures, guards or mechanical handling devices, can help minimize worker contact with hazardous substances.

The most important thing is for workers, who may be exposed to skin irritants, to be informed about the hazards, understand the precautions to take, and know

what processes and equipment to use to avoid or minimize exposure.

