

Seasonal dermal reactions

Choices® educational resources

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Climate and environmental factors may increase the susceptibility of some individuals to dry skin or even chronic irritant dermatitis. In the fall and winter months, the cold, dry and windy weather may cause exposed skin to become dry, itchy and reddened. Indoor air that has been heated and lacks proper humidity may have the same effect. Combine these variables with frequent hand washing and glove use, and the result may be compromised skin integrity.

Practices that may increase the risk of dermal reactions

- Frequent hand washing/surgical scrub time longer than 5 minutes
- Use of harsh antimicrobial soaps, i.e., chlorhexidine gluconate, iodophors, Dial® or Safeguard® hand soaps
- Indoor air quality: heated and dry in winter months
- Personal hand-care products not approved by an Infection Control professional
- Use of highly fragranced, commercial hand lotions
- Inappropriate use of topical agents
- Absence of an approved hand-care protocol

Practices that may decrease the risk of dermal reactions

- Use of powder-free gloves
- Use of milder soap or scrub
- Use of an alcohol gel or rub
- Reduced surgical scrub time (2 to 3 minutes is adequate) contingent on department policy
- Frequent use of an approved hand lotion/moisturizer

Most seasonal dermal reactions are temporary and are effectively managed through improved hand care. If symptoms associated with a dermal reaction persist, seek advice from Occupational Health Services.

Hand-care plan

The practice of adhering to a simple hand-care plan will minimize the effects of cold weather and low-humidity air.

Hand washing

- Use tepid water.
- Use a mild soap or antimicrobial agent.
- Rinse hands thoroughly.
- Dry gently.

Hand disinfection (when hands are not visibly dirty)

- Apply an alcohol-based rub, gel or sanitizer.

Skin wellness

- Liberally apply a water-based lotion/moisturizer or other approved hand-care product.
- Use gloves that moisturize, promote healing and soothe and protect skin from the symptoms of irritant dermatitis.

NOTE: Do not use over-the-counter hand-care products in the clinical environment. Only products that have been evaluated and approved by the Infection Control Department should be used.

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