

Handwashing is becoming a more frequent occurrence with the current COVID-19 pandemic. It is important to get the right balance between sanitising and hand care

Why is my skin so dry?

The top layer of our skin forms a barrier or a protective layer. When we are washing our hands frequently the water, soap, and cleanser disrupts this. With repetitive hand washing there is more disruption to this skin barrier leading to dryness, irritation, and inflammation. This is referred to as irritant contact dermatitis. This then can become infected with different bacteria.

Maintaining the skin barrier function is paramount

How can I prevent hand dermatitis?

1. Avoid irritants

- Use a soap free wash: Soaps have a high pH (alkaline) which disrupts the skin barrier
- Only wash your hands if they are visibly soiled. This limits your exposure to water

2. Dry hands thoroughly

- areas with moisture can lead to skin irritation and breakdown
- ensure you dry the webspaces of your fingers and under jewellery (rings)

3. Avoid fragranced products

- fragrances can cause an allergic contact dermatitis

4. Re-establish the skin barrier

- use a regular moisturiser. A cream or lotion applied consistently during the day and a thicker ointment before you go to bed
- Products that have ceramides in their active ingredients can help your skin re-build the top protective layer: eg. *QV Intensive with Ceramides* or *CeraVe*

5. Use an alcohol (ethanol) based hand sanitiser

- Use hand sanitisers that are ethanol based. Benzalkonium chloride based sanitisers and cleaning products (eg. *Canesten Hygiene Laundry Rinse*, *Dettol Antibacterial Surface Wipes*) can potentially cause an allergic contact dermatitis.
- Hand sanitisers are less likely to cause dermatitis than soap and water
- A stinging sensation may be experienced. This does not mean you are allergic to the sanitiser. It is typically due to small breaks in the skin (like a paper cut stinging)

6. Use gloves

- Ensure you minimise exposure of your hands to wet/moist activities.
- Wear cotton gloves underneath rubber gloves when doing wet activities (washing dishes) and cotton gloves when doing dry activities (sweeping) to reduce the need to wash your hands
- Wearing cotton gloves overnight after you apply your thick ointment-based moisturiser can help increase the penetration into your skin
- Ansell white cotton gloves can be purchased from the dishwashing section from Coles/Woolies

7. Protect your cuticles

- Your nail cuticles protect the area between the nail and nail fold.
- If you've lost the cuticles then you can develop irritation, swelling, and redness
- Don't push the cuticles back or cut them
- Apply Vaseline to your cuticles at night