

Covid-19 precautions and the skin of healthcare workers

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– The effects of hand hygiene and PPE on the skin of healthcare workers

Skin problems caused by frequent handwashing and PPE (personal protective equipment such as masks, goggles and gloves) are prevalent amongst frontline workers.

- Goggles and tight-fitting FFP3 masks when worn for long periods are particularly implicated in causing pressure-related redness and erosions.
- Frequent handwashing (10+ times a day) increases the risk of hand dermatitis.

– The risks

- Damaged skin can lead to touching the face when not wearing masks (thus increasing infection risk).
- Shifting pressure of masks and goggles off damaged skin may cause a breach in PPE protocol, so preventing skin damage is key.
- Painful fissures and erosions on the hands may make it impossible to sterilise the hands effectively and lead to time off work.

– What can be done?

- Shorter rotating shifts with regular breaks from PPE may help by reducing the duration of pressure.
- Silicone tape and barrier sprays can help to protect pressure areas on the cheeks, forehead and nose (*mask seal must be rechecked if tape is being used).
- Regular use of moisturisers on the face can help to limit irritation.
- Very frequent use of hand moisturisers during work breaks can help to reduce dryness and irritation of the hands.

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**When tape, barrier sprays and/or moisturisers are used on the face, it is essential for all staff to check that there is no loss of fit. Re-fitting of PPE is necessary in all cases.*

Read the official in-depth advice at: <https://www.bad.org.uk/shared/get-file.ashx?itemtype=document&id=6688>

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