

## Covid 19 - Hand Washing & Hand Dermatitis



### **How can I manage my Hand Dermatitis and combat the effects of frequent hand-washing?**

People with eczema should follow the government guidance to wash hands with soap and water, rather than a moisturiser substitute, as much as practically possible. Regular handwashing is the most important way to minimise the risk of contracting and spreading infection. An antibacterial soap is not necessary.

Washing hands with moisturisers may not be as effective as using soap for removing the virus because virus particles could be left on the skin within the residual moisturiser that has not been washed away.

Frequent washing of hands with soap (even a soap free wash) can, however, cause problems for people with hand dermatitis. It is very important people find ways of managing dry skin and hand dermatitis that may be caused or worsened by frequent washing with soap.

### ***Top Tips for Hand Dermatitis:***

- Protect your hands by using barrier creams or wearing gloves. It can also be beneficial, if the condition of the skin is severe, to combine both precautions. Avoid wearing gloves for long periods of time (longer than 20 minutes) as this can cause the hands to sweat, causing more irritation and itching. If you want to wear rubber gloves, buy the ones with a cotton lining
- Take your own suitable cleansing and moisturising products with you when you are out and about – you can buy larger sized products and decant them into smaller travel bottles to always keep handy in your car, handbag etc. This helps with the frequent hand washing even while you are out
- Dry hands well after washing by gently patting them dry, not rubbing. This is important for two reasons: firstly, germs are transferred more easily between wet hands. Secondly, water itself has a drying effect on the skin by reducing the skin's natural oils when it evaporates, thus impairing the skin barrier
- Soap free products are suitable to use – even though most of the Government directives mention 'soap', soap substitutes have nearly identical cleansing properties to normal soap

- If you have to wash your hands while out with what's available and cannot moisturise, as soon as you get home, rewash hands with your soap free substitute and apply moisturiser to combat the drying effects
- The same applies with hand sanitiser – most of the hand sanitisers available at places we visit are not suitable for people with skin conditions. There are some brands available which can be used if necessary – buy the large bottle for home then decant into a smaller travel one. Consult your local Pharmacist and always patch test anything new first!
- If you are entering a premises and a condition of entry is hand sanitising, politely say that you cannot use their brand and bring out your own bottle. Usually there is no problem with the entry conditions – they just like to see you using one! It is also helpful to re-moisturise your skin after sanitiser use when possible
- In public places where you can't avoid touching surfaces, try not to touch your nose, eyes or mouth (or your child's) because the virus gets in through mucous membranes
- Rehydrate and soothe sore dry hands overnight, using an ointment and wearing clean cotton gloves or if your hands are really itchy and burning, use your favourite moisturiser cream and/or topical steroid cream from the refrigerator
- If you do experience a flare, consult your GP or Dermatologist - you may need some extra help. It may also be helpful to obtain an exemption letter you can show explaining that you cannot use hand sanitiser because of your condition.

*The information in this article was obtained from [www.eczema.org](http://www.eczema.org), [www.medicalnewstoday.com](http://www.medicalnewstoday.com)  
& The Australasian College of Dermatologists*

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