

Preventing and Managing Skin Rashes in Agriculture

Agricultural workers are exposed to conditions that can cause skin irritation and rashes. Prevention and early intervention are the first lines of defense.

Potential causes of irritation and allergic reactions include:

- Exposure to certain types of plants and seeds
- Contact with fertilizers, pesticides, machinery fluids and oils
- Spider bites and insect bites and stings
- Exposure to sun, hot temperatures and humidity

Prevention

Precautions should be taken to prevent exposure. In general, it is helpful to be able to identify and avoid poisonous, allergenic and irritant plants, as well as insects that bite or sting.

To help prevent exposures that cause skin rashes and other reactions:

- Wear protective clothing: gloves, long-sleeved shirt, long pants, dust mask or scarf, boots and hat with a neck covering
- Wash your hands with soap and water, especially before handling food
- Wash clothes separately in hot water and detergent
- Clean footwear and tools with rubbing alcohol and water
- Apply insect repellent and sunscreen on exposed skin
- Keep food that attracts insects in enclosed containers and get rid of trash
- Avoid burning poisonous plants and breathing smoke from any source

First Aid

When you come in contact with an irritant or allergen, your skin may become inflamed or itchy. You may develop red, dry, scaly patches or blisters that ooze. Most rashes will heal in five to 12 days, but in some cases they can last for weeks. See a medical professional for severe skin eruptions and infections.

For first aid:

1. Apply a wet compress, calamine lotion or non-prescription hydrocortisone cream to reduce itching and blistering. Some people find an oatmeal bath is soothing.
2. Use an over-the-counter antihistamine for itch relief. Follow dose instructions. Be certain it is non-drowsy and will not affect your ability to work safely.
3. Use an over-the-counter topical wash for poison ivy/oak and follow label instructions for use.



4. Clean the affected area with soap and water. Keep your skin clean and dry, and use absorbent powder to avoid chaffing.
5. Monitor for signs and symptoms of infection such as redness, swelling or drainage.

Other Skin Exposures

Outdoor workers are at risk of cuts, scrapes and puncture wounds that can become infected. Washing cuts and scratches with soap and water helps prevent infection.

Agricultural workers can also be exposed to chemicals such as machinery fluids and oils, pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers and the carrier used to dilute active ingredients. Some chemicals can be absorbed through the skin and may cause serious health problems. Severe blistering can occur when some pesticides contact the skin. Exposure can also occur when clothes or shoes become saturated with chemicals.

With proper handling, skin reactions can be avoided. Trained personnel who work with pesticide mixing, loading and applications should use the manufacturer's recommended personal protective equipment to reduce exposure. The specific pesticide formulation and application method will determine the best type of gloves and other protective gear to use.

Spider bites and insect bites and stings often cause pain, swelling, rashes and other types of skin reactions. For relief of pain and itching, medical professionals suggest elevating the bite area and applying an ice pack or cool, wet cloth for 15 to 20 minutes once an hour for up to six hours. Non-prescription medications may be used for relief of itching and swelling.

Heat rash occurs when your body isn't able to freely sweat. It may appear as clusters of small, red bumps with a prickly or stinging sensation or as tiny blisters. Bathing in cool water and wearing loose-fitting, light-weight clothing reduces discomfort.

If you are taking a new medication and develop a red, spotty rash, check with your doctor. You may be having a reaction to an ingredient in the medicine. When a rash is painful, spreads or won't go away, contact WorkCare and consult with a medical professional.

To learn more, refer to WorkCare's Fact Sheets on insects and spiders, poisonous plants and ticks:



[Avoiding and Treating Work-Related Insect Bites and Stings](#)



[Poisonous Plants: Exposure Avoidance and Response](#)



[Tick Bites, Disease Exposure Risk and Prevention](#)