# Protecting skin when cleaning in hospitality

Cleaning work can expose skin to water, products and other substances. Staff need to understand the controls for the actual task and how to use the selected protection. Explain how to check gloves or other PPE, where replacements are kept and how problems are reported. Selection should come from the assessed exposure and product instructions, including compatibility and fit.

*GB general awareness; employer selects protection for the actual exposure and supplies use instructions.*

## The practical principles

### Use protection suited to the task

PPE means personal protective equipment. Gloves, eye protection, protective clothing and hearing protection have different purposes. The employer's assessment determines what is required and how it is used with other controls. A glove suitable for food handling may be unsuitable for a cleaning chemical. Confirm the specified type, size, compatibility and replacement arrangements before starting.

### Check and care for equipment

Inspect PPE before use and report damage, poor fit or missing parts. Follow the instructions for putting it on, removing it, cleaning and storage. Contaminated equipment can transfer chemicals to skin or food. Single-use items and reusable items need different handling. Keep protective equipment available where the task occurs and ask for a replacement when it no longer works as intended.

### Protect and monitor skin

Frequent wet work and contact with irritants can damage skin. Use the workplace's exposure controls and washing and drying arrangements. Report redness, cracking, itching or other changes early and obtain appropriate health advice. Employer-provided skin care may support the routine while the cause of exposure is addressed. Gloves need to suit the task and the person; problems with sweating or irritation should be raised.

## Work through a shift scenario

Fictional exercise: a cleaner reports sore skin and says the usual gloves trap moisture during long tasks. The supervisor follows the reporting and support arrangements, reviews the task controls and arranges appropriate advice through the employer. The response should consider exposure and working methods as well as the equipment. Staff should avoid experimenting with unsuitable replacement gloves.

## Avoid the common failure

Barrier creams do not replace appropriate control of exposure or the protective equipment selected for a task. Damage, contamination or poor fit can reduce protection. Explain removal and storage arrangements and the early reporting of skin changes. Clinical assessment and treatment belong with appropriate healthcare support.

## A second situation to discuss

Fictional scenario: A cleaner's gloves are torn and their hands have become sore after repeated wet work.

Stop the uncontrolled exposure, obtain suitable replacement protection and report the symptoms. Ask the supervisor to review the wet-work and chemical arrangements and seek appropriate health advice. Record the issue through the workplace process.

## Use a working record

Record the specific arrangements below before the briefing. Keep the wording short enough for a colleague to use during the shift. Where a field does not apply, explain why; where information is missing, assign a person to resolve it. Store personal or sensitive details in the business's approved system.

- Task/substance
- selected protection
- fit/condition check
- removal/storage
- replacement
- skin concern reported
- follow-up

At the next handover, ask what changed, which action remains open and who now owns it. Close the record only when the agreed follow-up is complete. A recurring problem should inform the next briefing and the relevant operational procedure.

## Check understanding

**PPE selection depends on:**

The actual task and exposure Protection must match the hazard.

**Food gloves are automatically suitable for chemicals?**

No; suitability must be checked Different materials provide different protection.

## A change of gloves causes skin problems on the wash-up shift

A worker reports sore hands after a new glove type arrives. Prolonged wet work is part of the shift. The old gloves and the new gloves look almost identical. What needs checking?

**Compare your decision**

Report the symptoms and ask the responsible person to review the task, exposure, glove suitability and other controls. Follow the workplace health-reporting route and seek appropriate clinical advice for symptoms. Do not assume switching size or wearing the gloves longer will solve it.

Keep the product reference and describe when wet work occurs. That detail helps the reviewer investigate both the equipment and the work pattern.

## Sources and scope

- Source: https://www.hse.gov.uk/skin/
- Source: https://www.hse.gov.uk/coshh/basics/control.htm

Original workplace examples and suggested record. Prepared 19 October 2026. Use the current linked guidance and the venue's procedures for operational decisions.

**Use this on shift**

Resource page and fillable working record · Read the online guide · Course details