

## Managing skin infections in the fishing industry

Intact skin helps protect against skin infections. Skin injuries and contact dermatitis (an irritant or allergic condition of the skin) disrupt the skin's protection and increase the risk of infection. Skin injuries can result from fishhooks, knives, punctures from fish spines and other traumatic injuries. Dermatitis can develop from contact with water and fish products (such as fish juice and slime) and from an allergy to seafood.

Skin infections are commonly caused by bacteria that live on the skin without causing harm, but which can cause infections like boils and abscesses if they enter the body through broken skin. Skin bacteria can spread between people. This occurs more readily where there is crowding, close physical contact, poor personal hygiene, uncovered wounds and sharing of personal items.

Less commonly, skin infections are caused by bacteria found in fish and marine environments.

Occasionally, skin infections caused by human or marine bacteria can result in a more serious infection. People with health conditions that increase their susceptibility to infection (e.g. diabetes or impaired immune system) are at greater risk.

Skin infections in the fishing industry can be managed by good personal hygiene, hygienic workplace conditions, appropriate first aid for cuts and abrasions, and careful management of wound infections.

### Persons conducting a business or undertaking

To manage the risk of skin infections in the fishing industry, persons conducting a business or undertaking should:

- provide adequate facilities for hand hygiene. This includes access to running water, a mild liquid soap and hand drying facilities like disposable paper towels
- promote skin care by encouraging workers to regularly wash and dry their hands and use a skin care product like a skin emollient to condition the skin
- provide adequate first aid facilities so wounds can be properly cleaned and covered
- maintain the workplace and ensure equipment is kept in a clean and hygienic condition
- implement safe systems within the workplace, including safe knife practices and the use of personal protective equipment to protect the skin, prevent wounds and reduce the risk of contact dermatitis
- instruct workers on personal and hand hygiene practices and how to manage wounds at work.

### Workers

Workers in the fishing industry can prevent skin infections by ensuring good personal hygiene and following safe work practices. They should:

- wash hands regularly with soap and running water and dry hands properly:
  - before eating, drinking and smoking
  - after contact with fish products

- after removing personal protective equipment
- after sneezing, coughing and using the toilet
- use a skin care product like a skin emollient to condition the skin
- not share personal items like towels, clothes and grooming items (e.g. nailbrushes, nail scissors, razors, tweezers and toothbrushes)
- cover skin breaks including cuts and abrasions with a water-resistant dressing
- clean wounds promptly and cover with a water-resistant dressing
- keep infected wounds clean and covered, and do not pick at or squeeze wounds
- help maintain the workplace and ensure equipment is kept in a clean and hygienic condition
- follow safety instructions and wear personal protective equipment to prevent wounds, protect skin and reduce the risk of contact dermatitis
- obtain medical advice for:
  - serious wounds (e.g. a deep puncture wound, embedded fish spine or major wound)
  - infected wounds
  - wounds in a worker with a health condition that increases their susceptibility to infection
  - contact dermatitis
- take all doses of prescribed antibiotics to treat skin infections in accordance with the doctor's instructions and do not share antibiotics with another person.

### **Further information**

For more information about workplace health and safety visit [www.worksafe.qld.gov.au](http://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au) or call Advisory Services on 1300 369 915.