



Keep Your Skin Clean and Healthy

Proper hygiene and health are closely related, and living on the streets can sometimes make it harder to consistently maintain good hygiene. Reduced hygiene is a risk factor for various infections and infestations.

Common Skin Problems

- Dryness: Cracked skin can allow bacteria to enter and cause infections.
- Burns: From using unsafe heat sources while trying to stay warm outside.
- Frostbite: Too much time in the cold can hurt your skin and tissue below.
- Sunburns: From excessive sun exposure.

Some of these conditions can be prevented by maintaining proper hygiene (i.e. washing hands/using sanitizer, showering when possible, using lotion, cleaning clothes), but others require more specific care (see next pages).



Foot Care 101: Keeping Your Feet Healthy

Common Foot Problems

- Athlete's foot: A contagious fungal condition commonly acquired by walking barefoot.
- Ulcer: Painful sores on the feet that extend through the entire skin layer.
- Corns/Callus: Toughened patches of skin developed due to friction or pressure.
- Trench Foot: Prolonged wearing of damp boots without breaks can lead to skin deterioration.

Taking Care of Your Feet

- Improper footwear like soggy socks or ill-fitting shoes can lead to foot issues.
- By dedicating just a few minutes daily to foot care, you can steer clear of pain, infections, and even amputations!
 - If you don't have daily access to running water, using a cleansing wipe helps too.
- Remember, seek medical attention if you're experiencing severe pain or if a foot problem persists.



Steps for Optimal Foot Care

1 Cleanse your feet daily with soap and warm water, ensuring thorough drying afterward.



4 Opt for well-fitting shoes that don't cause discomfort and allow your feet to breathe. Take breaks to let your feet air out.



2 Moisturize dry or cracked feet often using products like lotions or petroleum jelly.



5 Trim toenails straight across with a nail clipper to prevent ingrown nails.



3 Swap out socks regularly to maintain dryness.



6 Steer clear of barefoot walking. Consider wearing flip-flops in communal showers or when your shoes and socks are off.



Protect Your Skin

Sun Safety

Exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun can cause sunburn, premature skin aging, eye damage and skin cancer. Sun damage can collect over a lifetime of exposure, therefore good habits now can pay off in the long run.

- Use sunscreen on exposed skin.
 - Apply waterproof sunscreen with UVA/UVB protection to all exposed areas (with a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of at least 60 on the face). Re-apply every two hours and after sweating.
- Protect your skin on cloudy days and in the winter too, as UV rays can reflect off of pavement, water, and snow.
- Cover your skin or find shade if possible. Wear UV-blocking sunglasses to protect your eyes.
- Be aware of any skin changes that could be related to sun exposure, see "Performing Self Skin Checks" for more information.



Frostbite: Avoid, Spot, Treat

- Make sure to dress appropriately when outdoors in cold weather.
- Alcohol and/or drug use can increase your risk of frostbite, as you may lose heat faster or have altered sensation.

While outside be sure to wear:

Avoid

A scarf or mask to cover your nose, ears, cheeks, mouth, and chin

A hat

Mittens or gloves

A water-resistant coat

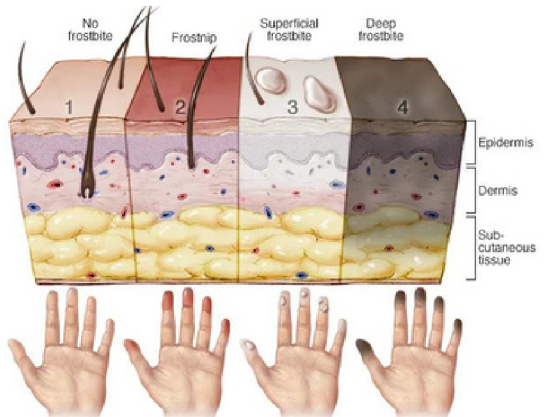
Several layers of dry, loose-fitting clothing

Water-resistant winter boots



Spot

- Victims may be unaware of frostbite because the frozen tissue is numb.
- Symptoms usually begin with the affected areas turning red and feeling cold, painful, or tingly/prickly (frostnip).
- If exposure to the cold continues, the area can become numb and inflamed as the tissues freeze.



Treat

- Seek medical attention and find a warm environment immediately.
- Remove wet clothes and warm the person under layers of dry fabric.
 - Don't put pressure on the affected area.
- The frostbitten area should be warmed by a professional. If severe, amputation may be necessary.

Be aware of hypothermia: if someone is experiencing constant shivering, rapid breathing, exhaustion, confusion, slurred speech, seek emergency medical attention.

Common Skin Infections/Infestations

Unhoused individuals have a higher risk of being exposed to and/or contracting various infectious diseases. Here are some common types of skin infections, and remember, recognizing these conditions is an important step to obtaining proper treatment!

Bacterial Skin Infections

Certain bacteria and fungi live on the skin of many people without causing harm. However, these microbes can cause skin infections if they enter the body through open wounds, or other breaks in the skin.

Cellulitis: a bacterial skin infection causing redness, swelling, and pain, that can spread to the blood and lead to serious health problems. Seek emergency medical attention if you have a swollen, warm, tender rash, a rash that's changing rapidly, or a fever.



Impetigo: a skin infection caused by Group A Streptococcus (GAS) or "strep" bacteria. Sores begin as small red spots, usually on the face, but can appear anywhere on the body. These develop into blisters that break open and ooze fluid that is contagious. After a few days, ruptured blisters form a flat, thick, honey-coloured crust that eventually disappears.

Staph: these bacteria commonly live on the skin, however specific variants such as "MRSA" are resistant to antibiotic treatments and can cause serious, potentially life-threatening infections.

- MRSA infections commonly occur where there is a break in the skin, areas covered by hair, or body folds.
- MRSA may look like a bump on the skin that may be red, swollen, warm to the touch, painful, filled with pus, or draining. It can also infect an open wound, causing an existing wound to worsen.



! If you think you have any of these conditions, see a doctor so they can examine the skin and provide treatment, which often involves antibiotics.

Parasitic Skin Infections

Tiny insects or organisms can live on the surface or within the skin causing infection.

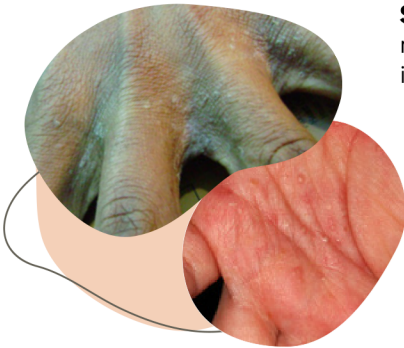
Lice: tiny insects that feed on blood from the human scalp, causing an itchy scalp or crawling sensation.

- Can find lice eggs or bugs in the hair.
- Often obtained by head-to-head contact.
- Can be self-treated with a specific lice shampoo/comb available for purchase at local pharmacies without a prescription.
- Clothing and blankets should be washed in hot water or placed for several days in a closed plastic bag.
- Close contacts should be inspected and treated if found to have lice.



Scabies: a highly contagious condition caused by mites that burrow into the skin, causing an intense itchiness and rash.

- The rash may appear as tiny red raised lesions that form below the neck and typically worsens at night or after a hot shower. Sores can form due to itching.
- See a doctor for treatment, which requires prescribed medications called “scabicides” and potentially antibiotics to prevent further infection.



Viral Skin Infections

Viruses can be transmitted via the skin, but may not cause skin symptoms.

Viral Rashes

- Viruses causing skin diseases include:
 - Shingles (shown on right) or Chickenpox (varicella-zoster virus - VZV)
 - **Vaccination** is the recommended prevention.
 - Warts (human papillomavirus - HPV)
 - Measles (morbillivirus)
 - Hand, foot, and mouth disease (coxsackievirus)
 - Blisters or sores (herpes simplex virus - HSV)
- Typically, impacted areas of the skin are contagious.
- A viral rash may not require treatment, but a healthcare provider can recommend certain creams or medications that may help reduce symptoms.
 - If symptoms don't improve in a few days or worsen, seek care.

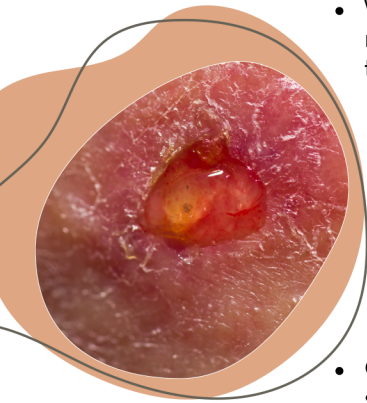


Viral Diseases

- HIV, Hepatitis C, and Hepatitis B are viruses that are transmitted via infectious body fluids, commonly by sexual and needle contact.
- Using Harm Reduction resources, such as needle exchanges, alcohol wipes, and wound care supplies are the most effective methods to prevent infection.
- Practice safer sex by using barrier protection and getting regular STI testing.



Chronic Wounds



- When acute (short-term) wounds become chronic, non-healing wounds, they are extremely difficult to treat.
 - The most common type of chronic wound is an ulcer, which is a painful, open wound that develops due to poor blood flow.
 - Factors that increase the risk of ulcer development in marginally housed individuals include long periods of walking or standing, poor sleeping conditions, underlying diabetes, or drug use which can restrict blood flow to the affected area.
- Chronic wounds elevate the risk of bone or surrounding muscle infections, potentially necessitating amputation.

Treat Your Skin

Performing Self Skin Checks

- Examine the skin regularly for suspicious spots. You can complete a full skin self-examination using both a full-length mirror and hand-held mirror, noting any skin changes or new moles.
- For help, use Save Your Skin Foundation's Skin Check Guide: <https://saveyourskin.ca/skin-check-guide/>
- See a doctor if you have...
 - Unusual skin conditions that don't heal in four weeks
 - Sore ulcers
 - Scaly patch on the skin
 - Any sore on the lips or in the mouth that doesn't heal
 - A mole that grows quickly, changes shape/colour, or bleeds repeatedly



Where To Go

Shelter Health Network

850 King St E., Hamilton + Various Locations (905-526-7137)

- Primary care services for persons with unstable housing, no family doctor, and complex health or social needs
- Call or check website for when staff will be visiting the multiple clinic sites, shelters, and social service agencies

<https://shelterhealthnetwork.ca>

HAM SMaRT

(1-833-426-7678)

- Outreach for those experiencing homelessness, poverty
- Focuses on mental health, addictions, chronic or infectious disease management, and wound care
- Provide basic necessities such as food, clothing, harm reduction supplies, and tents
- Mobile service meeting patients where they are most comfortable

<https://www.hamsmart.ca>

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678 Main St. E, Hamilton (905-544-4320)

- Aboriginal Health Centre providing comprehensive, culturally safe primary care
- Aboriginal Patient Navigator program provides pathways to healing through a Wholistic approach, helping navigate Traditional Healers, medicines, and practices

<https://aboriginalhealthcentre.com>

The Hamilton Hub

78 Vine St., Hamilton (365-833-7854)

- Primary care drop in (Tuesday-Friday from 1:00-4:00 PM) with family physicians specialized in caring for those experiencing homelessness and/or addictions
- Street Health clinic (Mondays from 1:00-4:00 PM) offers services such as STI testing and harm reduction supplies

<https://www.thehamiltonhub.org/clinic>

Willow's Place

196 Wentworth St N., Hamilton (905-528-5100 ext 1200)

- A low-barrier clinic for women-identifying individuals over the age of 18
- Clinic run by Dr. Cheryl Allaby Thursdays 1:00-4:00 PM

The AIDS Network

140 King St E. suite 101, Hamilton (1-866-563-0563)

- Offers a variety of clinical and harm reduction services
- Testing for sexually transmitted infections, HIV support, and vulnerable population clinics (Men4Men; African-Caribbean-Black Outreach)
- Office hours: Monday-Friday from 10:00 AM-4:00 PM

<https://aidsnetwork.ca>

+ more skin health resources and details on The SkinCARE Project at: <https://www.thehamiltonhub.org/clinic>

- **Community Healthcare Options:** visit <https://ontario.ca/healthcareoptions> or call (1-866-330-6206)
- **Telehealth Ontario:** Speak to a Registered Nurse 24/7 at (1-866-797-0000)



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