

Hairdressers reluctant to claim workers comp, study finds

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Occupational contact dermatitis is one of the most common work-related diseases in the developed world. Credit: iStock

A large number of hairdressers do not claim workers compensation for occupational contact dermatitis, according to a recent study.

Occupational [contact dermatitis](#) is one of the most common work-related diseases in the developed world and is caused by a range of workplace exposures such as frequent [hand-washing](#) or exposure to irritating or allergic substances.

Conducted by Dr Tessa Keegel from Monash University and doctors Georgina Lyons and Rosemary Nixon from the Skin and Cancer Foundation, the study compared diagnosed disease data for occupational contact dermatitis in hairdressers from 1993 to 2009 in Victoria, Australia.

The study was funded through an Institute for Safety, Compensation and Recovery Research (ISCRR) development grant.

Dr Keegel, from the Monash Department of Epidemiology and [Preventive Medicine](#), said that over a 17 year period 157 hairdressers and hairdressing apprentices were diagnosed with

occupational contact dermatitis.

"During this same time period, data from ISCRR's Compensation Research Database showed only 46 worker compensation claims for occupational contact dermatitis, less than one third of diagnosed cases," Dr Keegel said.

"Given that only a small percentage of hairdressers with this problem are referred to and attend a consultant dermatologist, the true discrepancy of claims to confirmed cases is likely to be much greater."

The study found the discrepancy between the high number of diagnosed cases and the low number of claims filed for occupational contact dermatitis is similar to findings in the United Kingdom and Denmark.

Hairdressers are particularly susceptible due to the amount of time spent with their hands in water, exposed to chemicals such as perming solutions or bleaches in [hair dyes](#), as well as sweating caused by wearing water-proof gloves for long periods of time.

"Skin problems are high in young hairdressers suggesting that many are unaware of and ill-equipped to manage them," Dr Keegel said.

"Hairdressers may accept dermatitis as 'part of the job', be unaware of their compensation entitlements or be put off by paperwork."

Past research suggests occupational contact dermatitis is more common in women than men, however when looking across all occupations, the majority of claims are made by men.

A number of hairdressers may also be self-employed and therefore not be represented in workers' compensation statistics. Fear of job loss may also influence reporting particularly among

apprentices and part-time workers.

"Increased efforts are needed to reduce the incidence of occupational contact dermatitis in hairdressers, particularly younger workers, and to ensure that hairdressers with occupational contact dermatitis are aware of their entitlements," Dr Keegel said.

Provided by Monash University

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