

# Our Skin



**What you need to know  
about skin diseases  
and skin care**



# Our Skin



This flipchart has been made to address some of the main skin problems that farmworkers experience and what can be done to treat and prevent future skin problems. The first part of the flipchart presents the skin, what it is made up of, and what it does for the body. The second part presents the main skin diseases including: pesticide poisoning, contact dermatitis, athlete's foot, ringworm, warts, scabies, and skin cancer.

In preparing for this presentation, the presenter can do the following:

- ◆ Read the flipchart thoroughly
- ◆ Read chapter 15: "Skin Problems" in *Where There is no Doctor* (pp. 193-216)
- ◆ Read pages 21-22, 41-43, and 56-58 in the *Camp Health Aide Manual*
- ◆ If possible, bring a bottle of sun block/sun screen lotion with SPF 15 or higher.

If you have any questions, please ask your program coordinator.

**Este rota-folio también se puede conseguir en español.**

#### **Acknowledgements**

This flipchart is the result of the work of many people:

Focus groups: Norma, Eliud, Pedro, Maria Angeles, and Beatriz, thank you for your ideas.

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Skin cancers photographs were courtesy of the National Cancer Institute and NIOSH.

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# Our Skin



**What you need to know about  
skin diseases and skin care**

**The skin is like a knight's armor that provides protection from:**

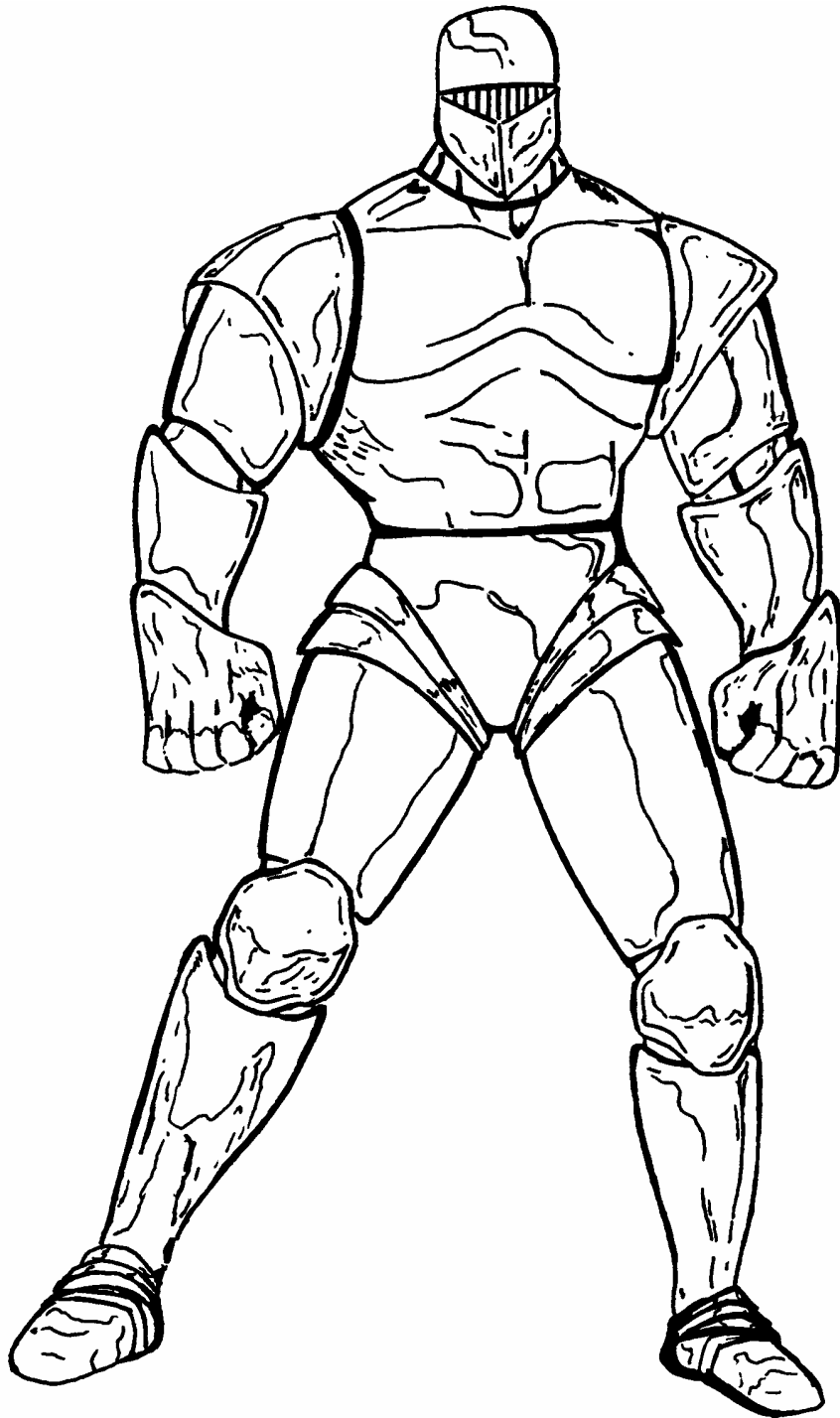
- ◆ the weather (the wind, the cold, and the heat)
- ◆ chemicals like pesticides and fertilizers
- ◆ plants and crops
- ◆ infections like fungus and viruses
- ◆ insects
- ◆ the sun's rays

**QUESTION:**

Can you think of any other chemicals that can damage the skin?

- ◆ cleaning products
- ◆ car products (engine cleaning products)
- ◆ metal cleaning products

The skin helps us maintain a normal body temperature. For example, when it is hot we sweat, and our body cools down. When it is cold we get goose bumps and shiver to warm up.



**The skin is  
a very  
important  
part of  
the body.**

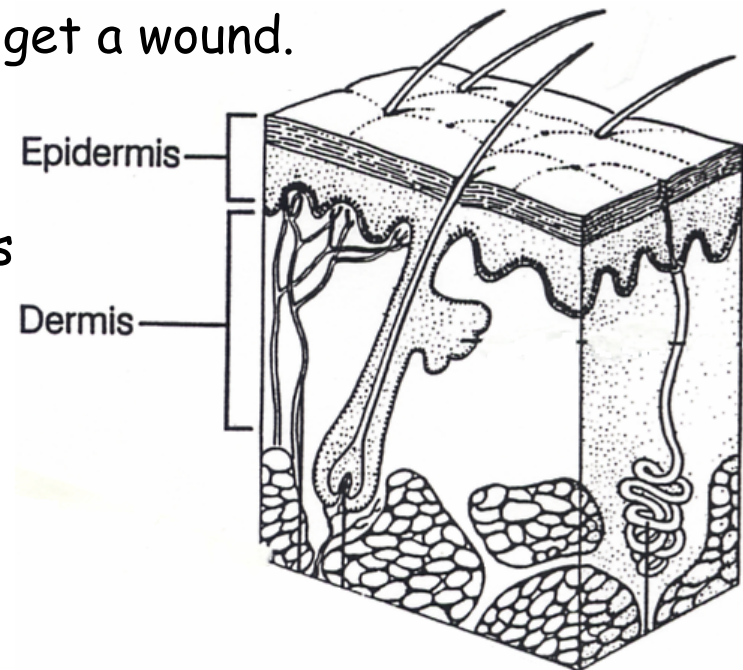
# What is the skin?

The body is made up of organs like the heart, the lungs, the brain, and many others.

**The skin is an organ made up of a special tissue.** Tissues are made up of cells. New cells are formed by dividing; one cell divides and becomes two and so on. This is how new skin grows after we get a wound.

The skin is made up of two main layers:

- ◆ The outer layer is called the epidermis
- ◆ The inner layer is called the dermis



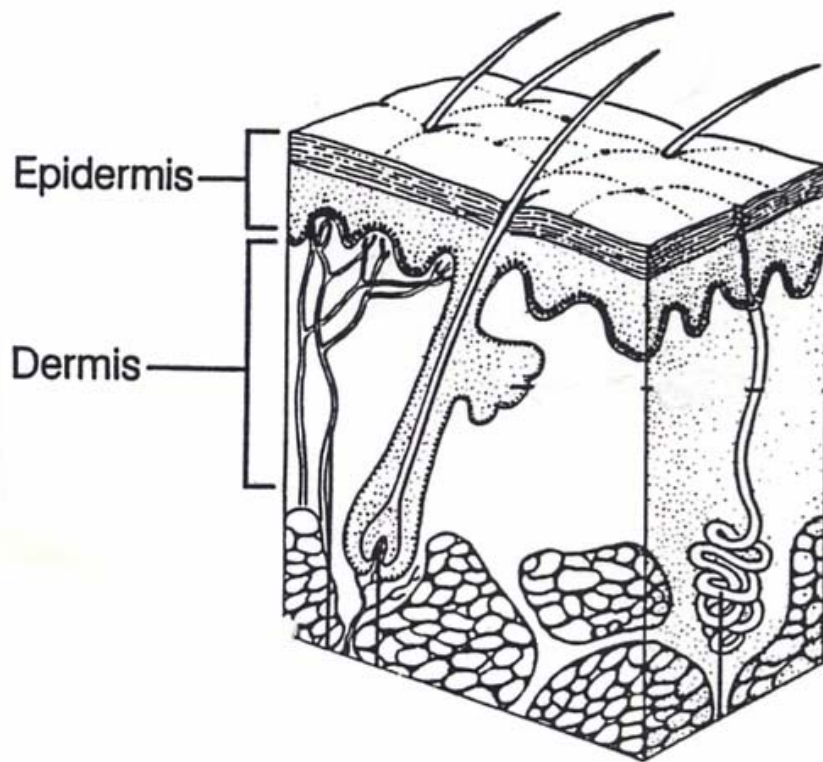
- ◆ The dermis has the blood vessels, the roots of the hair, and glands.
- ◆ These glands produce sweat and sebum, an oily substance that helps keep the skin from drying out.
- ◆ Sweat and sebum reach the skin's outer layer through tiny openings called pores.



# What is the skin?



The skin has several layers, like an onion.



Nails, hair, sweat and oil glands are also part of the skin.

## **Skin disease affects everybody.**

At different times in their lives, most people suffer from some kind of skin problem: an ingrown nail, a wart, a rash, sunburn, or other diseases.

But some people have to deal with more things that affect the skin than others, especially people who work outdoors and use their hands like we do in farmwork.

In the fields, we have to mix the pesticides, pick the crops, touch the soil, work under the sun, and even in the rain.

Our skin has to put up with a lot, so we need to take care of our skin.

**Our work affects our skin.**



## **PESTICIDES**

Pesticides can be found in the soil, in plants, fruits and vegetables, in the air, and sometimes in the water. Pesticides are used a lot in farming. They come in different forms like liquid or sprays, powders, gases, or granules. Pesticides are a poison. They are strong chemicals that are made to kill weeds and insects.

Pesticides can enter the body through the skin. Pesticides can stick to clothes, skin, nails, and hair. Pesticides can make farmworkers a little sick or very sick and can cause skin problems.

## **PREVENTION**

At work, farmworkers touch fruits and vegetables that have been sprayed with pesticides. Your hands can then spread the pesticide to other parts of your body.

- ◆ Wash your hands and face with soap and clean water before eating, drinking, smoking, chewing gum or tobacco, or putting on makeup.
- ◆ Wash your hands before touching your eyes, nose, mouth, or before going to the bathroom.
- ◆ Clean under your fingernails and toenails before showering to get rid of any pesticides.
- ◆ Take a shower with soap and water after work and change into clean clothes.
- ◆ Wash your hair and any facial hair.
- ◆ Wash work clothes separately from your regular clothes.
- ◆ Wear long-sleeved shirts and pants.
- ◆ Use gloves when possible.

## **SYMPTOMS**

It may be hard to know if a skin rash has been caused by a pesticide.

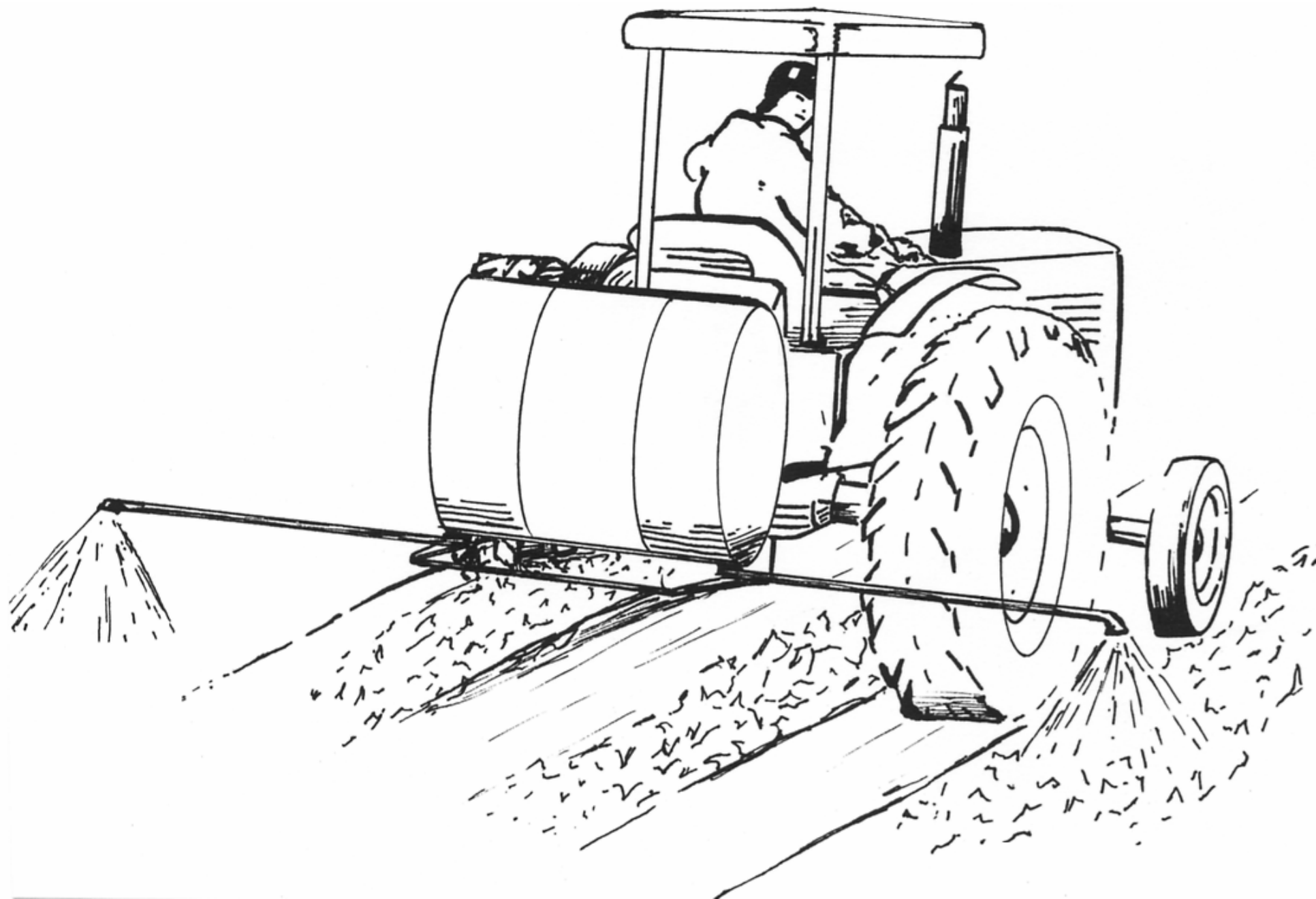
Some signs of pesticide poisoning are:

- ◆ red, watery and itchy eyes
- ◆ sweating
- ◆ muscle cramps
- ◆ skin rashes, red bumps
- ◆ nausea
- ◆ tiredness
- ◆ itching

## **TREATMENT**

- ◆ If someone starts having symptoms of pesticide poisoning, it is very important they receive medical attention. Poisoning can get worse and make the person very sick.
- ◆ Try to find out when the person started to feel sick and what crop the person was picking. Ask the crew leader or the boss which pesticides had been used in that area and when.
- ◆ Have this information when you go to the clinic.

Pesticides can harm the skin.



Some plants and crops can cause itchy skin rashes or irritations or severe allergic reactions because they have chemicals on them. These chemicals can be pesticides or fertilizers. A chemical can also be a natural substance like oils produced by certain plants. Sometimes, it only takes a small amount of certain chemicals to cause damage to the skin.

In the field, you may find poisonous plants like poison ivy, poison oak, and poison sumac. These plants cause contact dermatitis.

Skin irritations caused by touching something are called: **CONTACT DERMATITIS.**

Contact dermatitis can occur by touching a plant, rubber, plastic, or metal. Every person is different and not everybody will get contact dermatitis from touching the same things.

## **SYMPTOMS**

**How can we recognize contact dermatitis?**

- ◆ A rash starts after touching something that irritates the skin or causes an allergy.
- ◆ The rash may itch, burn, or be painful.
- ◆ Many times the rash is on the face and neck, hands and wrists, inside of elbows, or behind the knees.
- ◆ The rash may start with swollen skin (tender, warm, red) and blisters may appear.
- ◆ The blisters may ooze and then form scabs as they dry.



Swollen arm  
with contact  
dermatitis

Leg with  
poison ivy



## **Severe Allergic reactions**

Some people are allergic to poisonous plants, other plants, or materials. An allergic reaction means that the person will get very sick every time she or he touches the plant or the material. In an allergic reaction, the person gets swollen, and the body is completely covered by hives. The person may also have problems breathing. Severe allergic reactions are very serious.

**SEVERE ALLERGIC REACTIONS REQUIRE MEDICAL  
ATTENTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE!**



Severe  
Allergic  
Reactions  
require  
medical  
attention  
as soon as  
possible.



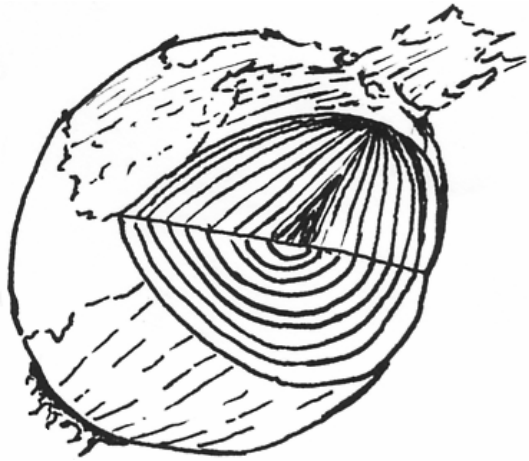
There are other common crops that cause irritation or allergic reactions in some people, for example, onion, tobacco, lettuce, celery, grape, tomato, asparagus, and citrus fruits like oranges, limes, and lemons.

## **PREVENTION OF CONTACT DERMATITIS**

- ◆ Learn to recognize poisonous plants in your area.
- ◆ Learn about the chemicals that you have to work with.
- ◆ Keep track of when the rash appears.
- ◆ If the skin rash only appears when you are picking a certain crop, go to the clinic; you might have an allergy to that crop.
- ◆ Talk to the boss or crew leader about doing another job if you are allergic to a crop.
- ◆ Wear long sleeves, long pants, and use gloves whenever possible.
- ◆ Wash with a mild soap if you get anything on your skin.

Contact dermatitis can be treated. But if the person keeps having contact with what causes the problem (if a person keeps working with the same plant that caused the contact dermatitis in the first place), the rash can keep coming back and may never go away completely.

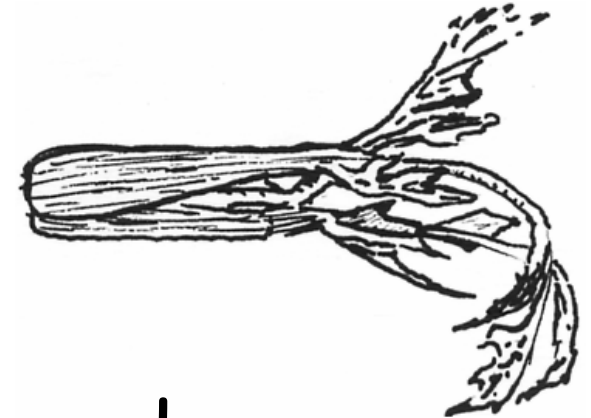
# Crops that can cause skin irritation



onion



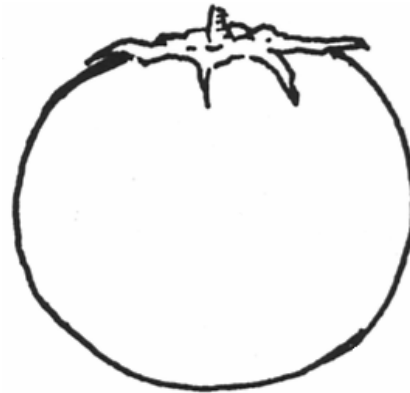
tobacco



celery



lettuce



tomato



grapes

# TREATMENT OF CONTACT DERMATITIS

**Don't scratch your skin with dirty fingernails. Keep fingernails short!**

When a person scratches the itchy area with dirty hands or fingernails, she or he can infect the area with germs. Skin infections cause the bumps or rash to collect pus and get red. You can get a cream or lotion (Calamine, Benadryl) to ease the itch from the drugstore.

**If the rash does not get better or if it spreads over the whole body, go to the clinic as soon as possible!**

**When skin is oozing and itchy:**

- ◆ Dip a clean cloth in cool, clean water.
- ◆ Apply the cloth to the skin for 5 to 10 minutes.
- ◆ Apply the cloth 2-6 times a day.
- ◆ Let the skin open to air and to dry.
- ◆ If there is an open wound, cover it loosely.

**If the skin is dry and itchy:**

- ◆ Soak the dry area in clean water.
- ◆ Right after soaking, apply petroleum jelly (Vaseline) or baby oil to keep in the moisture.
- ◆ Repeat as often as needed to keep the skin soft.
- ◆ If the itching does not let you sleep at night, make a paste of oatmeal with water and put it on the irritated area.



**If the rash  
does not  
get better  
or spreads,  
go to  
the clinic!**

# Skin Infections

Some skin problems are infections caused by fungus and viruses.

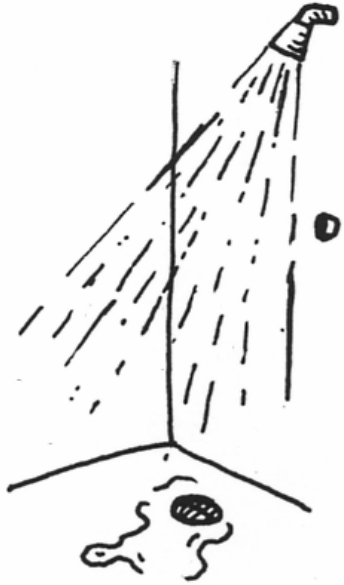
## FUNGUS

A fungus is a living germ that will grow if not treated.

Fungus grows in many places, especially in moist and warm places like:

- ◆ Sweaty feet and wet socks
- ◆ Shoes that keep in wetness and sweat  
(like work boots and tennis shoes)
- ◆ A bandage that stays on the foot too long
- ◆ Bathroom floors
- ◆ Shower stalls

# Fungus grows in these places:



Bathroom floors  
and showers

Sweaty Socks



Shoes that keep in  
wetness and sweat



# ATHLETE'S FOOT

Athlete's foot is a type of fungus infection of the feet.

## PREVENTION

- ◆ Keep feet clean and dry.
- ◆ Dry feet completely after washing (including between the toes).
- ◆ Wash socks and towels in hot water.
- ◆ Try to wear plastic sandals when showering in a house or bathroom shared by other people.
- ◆ Do not share towels or socks (the fungus can be passed from person to person by sharing personal clothing and/or towels).

## SYMPTOMS

- ◆ Infection can usually be seen in the area between the toes, on the soles and sides of the feet or on the hands.
- ◆ At first the skin becomes white and soft, then it cracks and peels.
- ◆ The skin is sometimes itchy.
- ◆ When the top skin layer is removed, the skin below is red.
- ◆ Sometimes, blisters appear and can be very painful, especially if they are on the bottom of the feet.
- ◆ If the cracked skin becomes infected with bacteria, swelling, redness, and oozing will happen.
- ◆ If the fungus infects the toenails, the nails may become thickened, yellow, and crumbly.

## TREATMENT

- ◆ Once you notice the infection, it should be treated as soon as possible.
- ◆ Buy an antifungal ointment, cream, or spray. These must be used for at least 4 weeks to cure the problem. Don't stop using the ointment or cream even if the skin gets better. If a month has passed and there is still itching, go to the clinic.
- ◆ Wash feet with mild soap and water.
- ◆ Dry between toes completely after taking a bath.
- ◆ Wear cotton socks that can absorb moisture.
- ◆ Change socks at least once a day.
- ◆ Wear sandals when possible to air out the feet.



# CHECK YOUR FEET



## **Some skin problems are caused by fungus and viruses.**

### **RINGWORM**

Ringworm is another skin infection that is caused by a fungus. It's not caused by a worm.

#### **PREVENTION OF RINGWORM AND WARTS**

- ◆ Avoid touching people who have ringworm or warts.
- ◆ Practice good personal hygiene.
- ◆ Do not share personal things with people who have ringworm or warts.

#### **SYMPTOMS**

The places on the body that have ringworm will have flaky, red skin. The area is usually round (like a ring). This infection may start out small and then it may spread.

#### **TREATMENT**

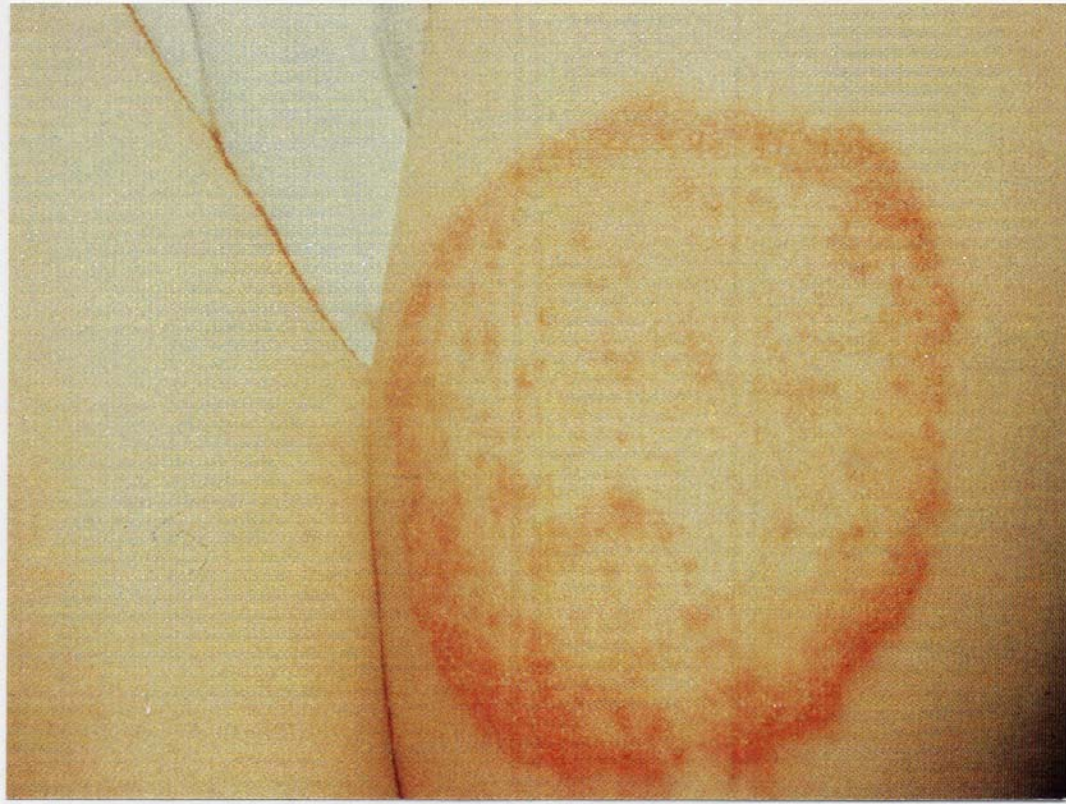
- ◆ Use an antifungal ointment or cream; it can be bought without a prescription.
- ◆ Before putting the ointment or cream on, wash and dry the skin very well
- ◆ It is probably best to use the ointment or cream two times per day. It may need to be used for several weeks.
- ◆ Wash the infected area with soap and water every day. Keep the skin clean and dry between washings.
- ◆ If the problem does not seem to be getting better or is spreading, get medical attention.

### **WARTS**

Warts are skin growths caused by a virus. A virus is a small germ. The virus enters the body through cracks in the skin and causes a thickening of the outer layer of the skin.

Warts may disappear by themselves. But if they are painful or become infected, they need to be treated by a health care provider.

**Warts in the genitals are more serious and are passed from one person to another through sexual contact. See a health care provider if you have warts in the genitals.**



Ringworm

Warts



Other skin diseases are caused by very small insects like lice, ticks, and mites or scabies.

## **SCABIES**

### **PREVENTION**

- ◆ Scabies is spread from person to person. Avoid touching a person who has scabies and recommend that the person be treated for scabies.
- ◆ Don't share bed linens, towels or clothes.
- ◆ Bathe and change clothes every day.
- ◆ Wash all clothes and bedding in soap and hot water and hang them in the sun to dry.

### **SYMPTOMS**

A person with scabies will have very itchy little red bumps all over the body. The bumps are usually in a curvy line or row. The bumps are mostly found in these places:

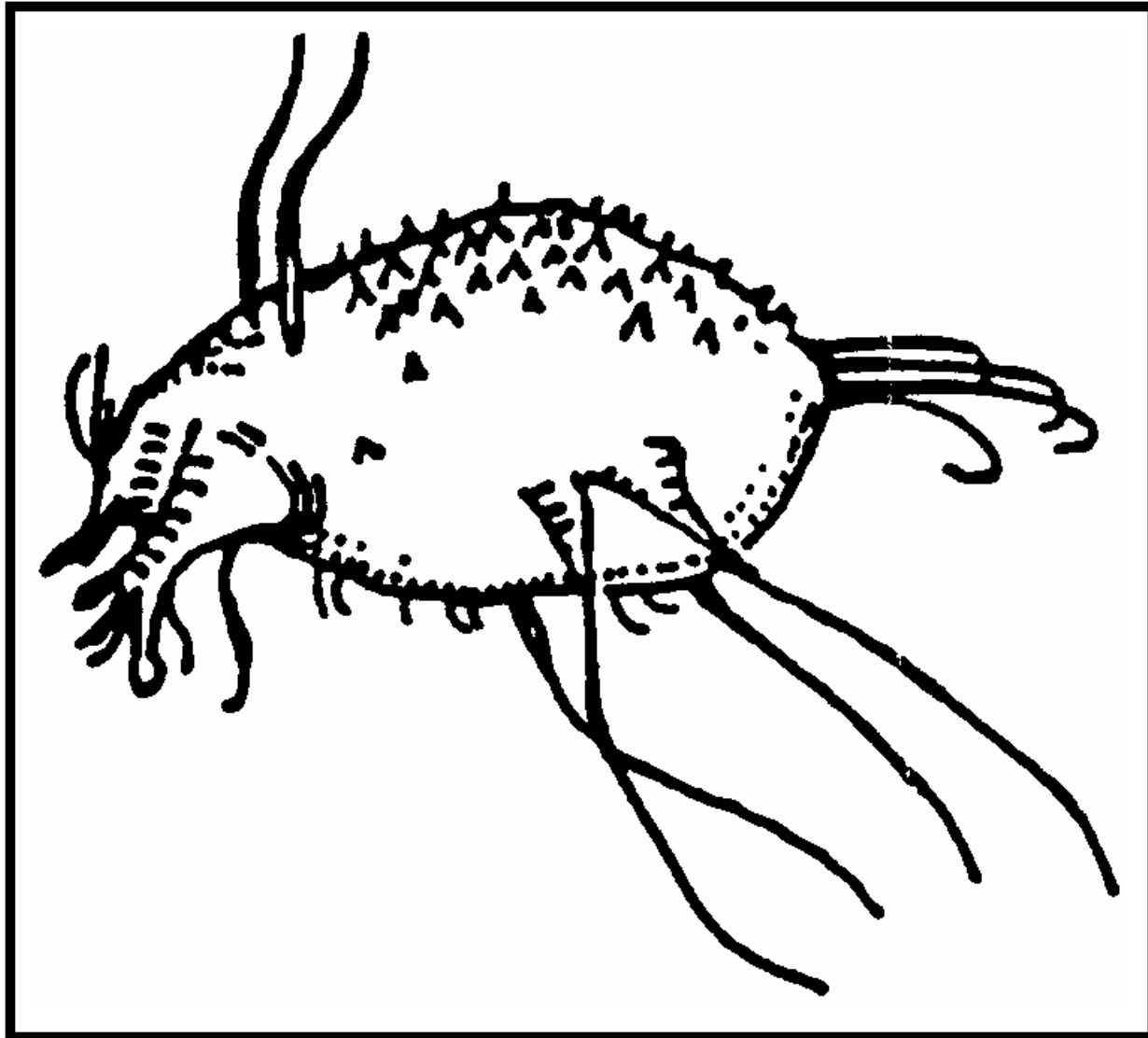
- ◆ between the fingers
- ◆ around the waist
- ◆ on the wrist
- ◆ on the genitals
- ◆ in the armpits
- ◆ at the belt line
- ◆ on the buttocks

The itching is usually worse at night. Scratching the itchy bumps can cause the skin to get infected. This may cause sores with pus.

### **TREATMENT**

- ◆ If one person in the family has scabies, then everyone in the family should be treated.
- ◆ A health care provider can prescribe a cream or lotion (like Kwell, Eurax or Elimite).
- ◆ Be sure to follow any directions given by the health care provider very carefully.
- ◆ Wash all clothes and bedding in soap and hot water.

Scabies are caused by mites that get under the skin.



# SKIN CANCER

## What is cancer?

Cancer is a disease where the body's cells start dividing and dividing without order or control. These cells grow for no reason and are of no use to the body. They are not normal cells and this is how tumors form.

## What causes skin cancer?

The sun's rays are very powerful. Too much exposure to the sun's rays without protection can cause cancer. Farmworkers are at risk of getting skin cancer because they spend many hours every day outdoors directly under the sun.

There are different types of skin cancer. Learning how to recognize early signs of skin cancer can protect you and your family.

## SYMPTOMS

- ◆ changes in the color of moles (birth marks). For example, if there are different shades of tan, brown, or black in the same moles, or any dashes of red, white, or blue
- ◆ any dark skin spots or scaly spots
- ◆ moles that are becoming rough or get little bumps
- ◆ pearly, slowly growing bumps
- ◆ changes in the way a mole feels or if it itches or burns
- ◆ the edges of a mole are ragged or blurred
- ◆ sores that do not heal

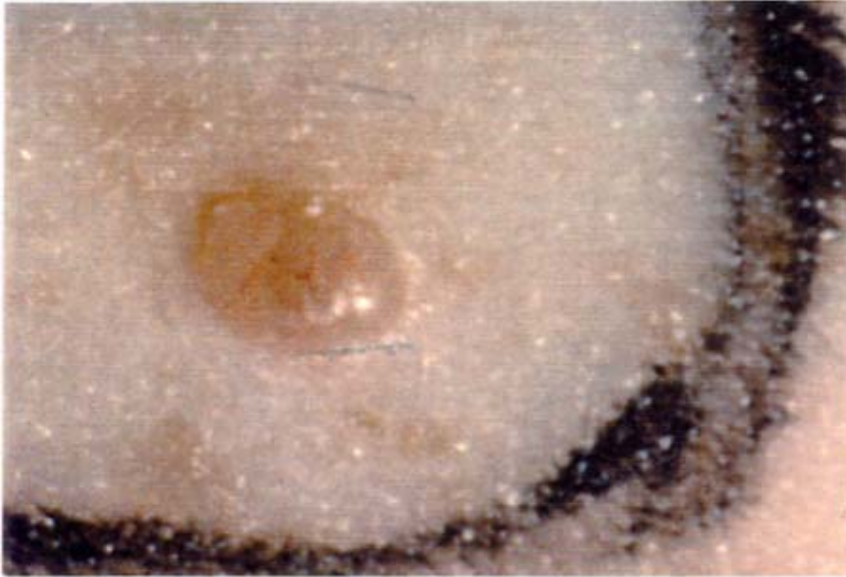
## TREATMENT

If a health care provider thinks that you might have skin cancer, she will send you to a dermatologist (a skin specialist). Then they will do tests to see if there are cancerous cells.

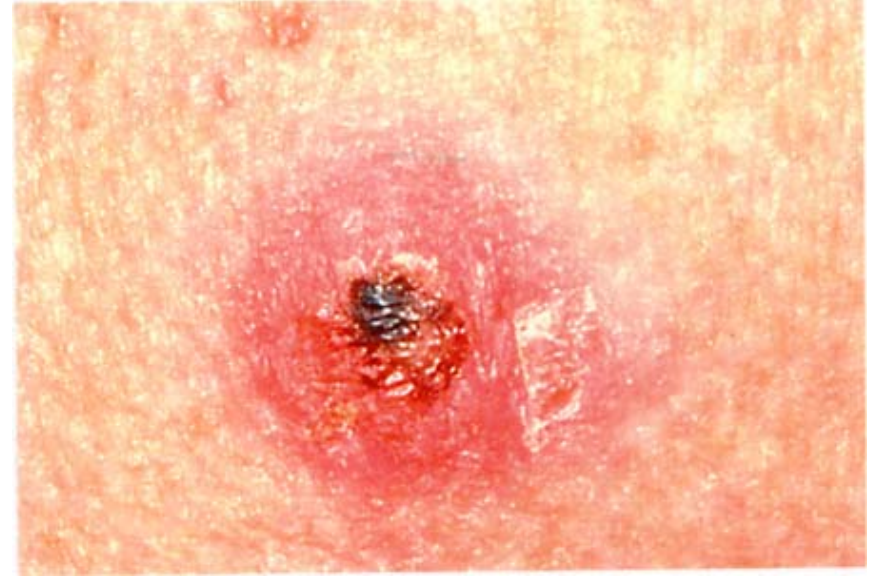
There are many forms of treatment for skin cancer. Fortunately, most skin cancers can be cured. But if skin cancer is left untreated, it can cause death.

Remember that skin cancer does not happen from one day to the next. Cancer can develop after being exposed to the sun without protection for many years. It is very important to start protecting our children's skin early in life.

**If skin cancer is detected early, it can be cured!**



Small, smooth, shiny,  
pale, or waxy lump



A lump that bleeds or  
develops a crust



Firm red lump



A flat red spot that  
is rough, dry, or scaly

# What can you do to prevent skin cancer?

## PREVENTION

Protect yourself from the damaging sun's rays by using sun blocks or sun screens. Sun screens can be bought in the supermarket and drugstore. Buy sun screen with a SPF (Sun Protection Factor) of 15 or higher.

## Explanation of SPF

SPF means Sun Protection Factor. This means how well the sunscreen protects the skin from the sun. A higher number means better protection for the skin. Always use a sunscreen with SPF 15 or higher.

- ◆ Apply sun screen 30 minutes before going outside. Apply it again every 2 hours.
- ◆ Do not depend on sun screen alone. Wear clothes to protect yourself. Cover your arms, legs, face, ears, and neck even during cloudy days.
- ◆ Protect the skin of your children so that they do not develop cancer when they are older.
- ◆ Check yourself in a mirror every so often. Look for any new moles, any changes in sizes and color of moles, or any sores that aren't healing.
- ◆ Go to the clinic if you see any of the early signs of cancer mentioned.



# You can prevent skin cancer



# What have we learned?

The skin is a tissue that covers our bodies. The skin is our protective armor, and it is our defense against:

- ◆ the weather (cold, heat, and wind)
- ◆ chemicals (pesticides, fertilizers, and cleaning products)
- ◆ plants and crops
- ◆ infections like fungus and viruses
- ◆ insects
- ◆ the sun's rays

We need to protect and take care of our skin! Always:

- ◆ Wear protective clothing. Clothes will protect us from pesticides and damaging sun's rays.
- ◆ Use sun screen with SPF 15 or higher.
- ◆ Protect your children's skin. Dress them in protective clothing and put sun screen with SPF of 15 or higher on them.
- ◆ Wear gloves when possible.
- ◆ Keep clothes clean.
- ◆ Wash work clothes separately from regular clothes.
- ◆ Use antifungal ointments for fungal infections.
- ◆ Do not scratch any skin irritations.
- ◆ Use soothing, refreshing creams to avoid scratching and keep fingernails short and clean.
- ◆ If you see changes in a mole or if you have a sore that does not heal, see a health care provider.

**Our skin is our first line of defense.**

**Taking care of our skin is a way of keeping our bodies healthy!**

Taking care of our skin is a way of keeping our bodies healthy!

