

Title of Document	Customer use of Emollients and Moisturiser Creams
Name of Department	Clinical Team

What type of document is this?	Work Instruction (WI)		
Which Helping Hands policy/SOP does this WI relate to?	Medication Management	Index number of policy/SOP	HHH-SOP-002

Which Operational Priority/Priorities does this document link to?	Governance Framework	Superior Client Care	People, Performance & Culture	Business Growth

Custodian of document	Group Managing Director	Committee/Group responsible for this document	Policy Committee
Approval date and committee chairperson signature	18.03.25	When is its next scheduled review?	18.03.28

Who does it apply to?	All Helping Hands staff working with Customers					
	Does it apply to bank workers?	Yes	Does it apply to agency staff?	NA	Does it apply to third party contractors?	NA

Purpose of the Work Instruction	To ensure the safe use of emollient and skin cream products used in customers' home. All customers using them regularly should keep away from fire, naked flames, or heat sources. Through risk assessing the customers' management of the creams this will reduce or eliminate the risks of build-up of residue on bedding, clothing, furniture, and wound dressings which can increase flammability.
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Content of Emollients and Moisturiser Creams Work Instruction

1.0 Policy statement

Helping Hands is dedicated to risk assessing customers who regularly use emollients / moisturisers on their skin, aiming to reduce or eliminate risks associated with naked flames. This assessment aligns with the guidance provided by healthcare prescribers and patient information leaflets.

2.0 Purpose

This work instruction addresses concerns about fire risks and severe burns associated with emollients and skin cream use. Paraffin-based products like soft white paraffin, liquid paraffin, and emulsifying ointment can act as fire accelerants. Even paraffin-free moisturisers may contain fire accelerants, so it would be advised to check the product information leaflet.

Identifying the risks and conducting a risk assessment will help mitigate or eliminate these dangers, preventing serious harm or death to customers.

3.0 Understanding the Risks

Fire risks in care services are significant due to the widespread use of emollients and creams for conditions like dry skin, psoriasis, and eczema. Some creams are prescribed, while many are available over the counter.

The fire risk arises when products that have absorbed flammable substances come into contact with open flames or ignition sources, such as lighted cigarettes. Customers who smoke pose a higher risk, especially when these products are applied to large parts of the body areas or when dressings or clothing become soaked with emollients.

Although emollients are not flammable on the skin, residue on fabrics can act as an accelerant, increasing ignition speed and fire intensity. This reduces the time to extinguish flames before serious burns occur and makes fires harder to extinguish than those involving regular fabrics.

All emollients, including lotions, creams, ointments, gels, sprays and soap substitutes carry this risk, including both paraffin-based and paraffin-free products. No emollient is safer than another regarding this hazard.

4.0 How to Support Customers Regularly using Emollients / Moisturisers

Emollients are easily transferred from skin onto clothing and bedding. There may also be reactions between emollients and fibres of dressing, clothing, and items such as towels used for personal care.

When fabric with dried residue of emollient contacts a naked flame, or source of ignition, this would result in a fire burning very quickly and intensely.

Scientific testing shows that fabric burns quicker and hotter when contaminated with emollients. These fabrics include clothing, towelling, bandages, or bedding. The emollients which have been tested, include:

- Contain paraffin
- Do not contain paraffin, such as those made with natural oils
- Contain other flammable constituents

Customers should continue to use emollients, but to avoid serious injury it is important to avoid any naked flames and sources of ignition. A person-centred risk assessment should be completed and cascaded to Helping Hands staff who are administering care to the individual, it should be fully documented in the plan of care.

6.0 Risk assessment

Helping Hands staff undertaking the risk assessment should ensure it is person centred with information such as:

- what products the customer is using?
- where and how frequently are they applied?

Risks are greater if they are applied to large areas and are absorbed into clothing, furniture, dressings, and bedding. Helping Hands staff should also consider the following:

- Does the customer smoke/smoke in bed?
- Does the customer use hairdryers/hair straighteners?
- Does the customer use naked flames such as candles, gas cookers or heaters?
- Does the customer wear loose clothing?
- How often does the customer change dressings, bedding, and clothing?
- Do they have an electric blanket?
- Do they fall asleep in front of a heat source?
- Are plugs overloaded?
- Do they use oxygen?

If the customer has not already been advised by a healthcare professional, they should be advised of the risks and:

Wash Regularly

Clothing and bedding should ideally be changed daily. The fabrics should be washed at the highest temperature recommended by the manufacturer with plenty of detergent to reduce the build-up of emollient/moisturiser, whilst washing at high temperatures might reduce the build-up, it does not remove it completely and there may still be a danger.

Furniture

Emollients / moisturisers can transfer from skin onto the fabric of furniture, cushions and blankets when sitting or lying on it. Customers should try and keep emollients / moisturisers off these. Customers need to avoid sitting too close to heat sources such as open fires and other heaters, particularly if they are likely to fall asleep. Chairs should be moved away from open fires or other heat sources.

Smoking

If the customer is wearing clothing or a bandage that has been in contact with an emollient / moisturiser, they should not smoke and never smoke in bed.

Cooking and Heating

Emollient/moisturiser users should also avoid cooking and any naked flames or heat source (such as gas, halogen, electric bar, or open fire) whilst wearing clothing or dressing that have been in contact with emollients/moisturiser. If cooking loose clothing should not be worn and leaning over a gas hob avoided. If cooking the customer should remove long sleeved or loose clothing before cooking, put on a thick uncontaminated shirt, overalls, or apron.

Naked Flames

These should not be used such as candles, matches, and lighters.

Equipment and Lifestyle choices

Electric blankets should not be used due to potential risk of ignition. Candles should not be used; plugs should not be overloaded. Hot items such as hairdryers and hair straighteners should not be placed on items that may have been soaked in emollients / moisturisers such as clothing, furniture, and bedding.

Information Sharing

Customers using emollients / moisturisers should not go near people who are smoking or using naked flames. They should inform their relatives and friends of the risks

Customers using Oxygen

Medical Oxygen is non-flammable but strongly supports combustion. It is highly dangerous in the presence of oils and greases and many plastics due to the risk of spontaneous combustion with high pressure gases. Where moisturising creams are required for use with a

facemask / nasal cannula, oil-based creams should not be used. Hands must be clean and free from any oils or grease before handling medical oxygen or equipment. Naked flames and smoking are prohibited when medical oxygen is in use. Customers who use nasal cannulas for medical administration who require an emollient to prevent drying and cracking of the skin around the nose and lips should consider using water-based skin products such as water-based moisturisers / lubricants.

Any advice given should be recorded in the communication log and a person-centred risk assessment detailing the management of risk. For complex cases, contact the local fire and rescue service for advice and support or your regional Clinical Lead

Note – Equality Impact Assessments are not required for Work Instructions

What was the previous version number of this document?	01	
Changes since previous version	At point of review updated the following: 1.0 Policy statement amended to improve readability 2.0 Purpose amended to improve readability 3.0 Understanding risks amended to improve readability Amended typos and terminology throughout document	
Who was involved in developing / reviewing/ amending this work instruction?	Clinical Team	
How confidential is this document?	Restricted	Can be shared freely within Helping Hands but NOT outside

References	https://www.gov.uk/drug-safety-update/paraffin-based-treatments-risk-of-fire-hazard https://www.cqc.org.uk/guidance-providers/learning-safety-incidents/issue-3-fire-risk-use-emollient-creams https://www.gov.uk/drug-safety-update/paraffin-based-skin-emollients-on-dressings-or-clothing-fire-risk https://www.gov.uk/guidance/safe-use-of-emollient-skin-creams-to-treat-dry-skin-conditions https://www.gov.uk/drug-safety-update/emollients-new-information-about-risk-of-severe-and-fatal-burns-with-paraffin-containing-and-paraffin-free-emollients https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/989660/A5_emollients_leaflet_Welsh.pdf
Associated Documents	Medications Management SOP