

Take 10 Steps When Workers Wear Contact Lenses Around Chemicals



Wearing contact lenses instead of eye glasses has become commonplace. And in some ways, contact lenses can improve workers' safety on the job. For example, wearing contact lenses under some circumstances gives workers a greater choice of [eye and/or face protection](#) as well as better vision. But contact lenses can also increase certain risks, particularly when workers work with or around certain hazardous substances.

So [NIOSH](#) recommends that employers take the following steps for contact lens use in a chemical environment:

Step #1: Conduct an eye injury hazard assessment. Conduct an evaluation in the workplace that includes an assessment of the following:

- Chemical exposures
- Contact lens wear
- Appropriate eye and face protection for contact lens wearers.

Step #2: Provide suitable eye and face protection for all workers exposed to eye injury hazards, regardless of contact lens wear. Wearing contact lenses doesn't appear to require enhanced eye and face protection. For chemical vapor, liquid, or caustic dust hazards, the minimum protection consists of well-fitting nonvented or indirectly vented goggles or full-

facepiece respirators. Close-fitting safety glasses with side protection provide limited chemical protection but don't prevent chemicals from bypassing the protection. Workers should wear face shields over other eye protection when needed for additional face protection but they shouldn't wear face shields instead of goggles or safety glasses, regardless of contact lens wear.

Step #3: Establish a written policy on general safety requirements for wearing contact lenses. [This policy](#) should cover the eye and face protection required, any contact lens wear restrictions by work location or task, chemical exposures that may affect contact lens wearers, and first aid for contact lens wearers with a chemical exposure.

Step #4: Comply with current requirements under the OHS laws on contact lens wear, and eye and face protection. [This chart](#) shows the requirements for or limits on the wearing of contact lenses under the OHS laws in each jurisdiction. And here are some questions to answer to comply with the [eye and face protection requirements](#).

Step #5: Notify workers and visitors of any areas where contact lenses are restricted.

Step #6: Identify to supervisors all contact lens wearers working in chemical environments to ensure the proper hazard assessment is completed, and the proper eye protection and first aid equipment are available.

Step #7: Train medical and first aid personnel in the removal of contact lenses and have the appropriate equipment available.

Step #8: In the event of a chemical exposure, begin eye irrigation immediately and remove contact lenses as soon as practical. Don't delay irrigation while waiting for contact lens removal. (See, [10 emergency eye wash best practices](#))

Step #9: Instruct workers who wear contact lenses to remove the lenses at the first signs of eye redness or irritation. Contact lenses should be removed only in a clean environment after the workers have thoroughly [washed their hands](#).

Step #10: Evaluate restrictions on contact lens wear on a case-by-case basis. Take into account the visual requirements of individual workers wearing contact lenses as recommended by a qualified ophthalmologist or optometrist.