# A screen shot of a computer Description automatically generatedchemical HANDLING: HEALTHCARE

Healthcare employees encounter many chemical and drug exposures that other fields do not. Powerful chemicals such as those used for disinfection and sterilization present unique health hazards and employees should be trained on the safe use of each.

Certain drugs that healthcare workers come in contact with have the potential to cause cancer and damage to organs or prevent them from functioning properly. Some effects can be irreparable even at low levels.

Additionally, they encounter materials that commonly cause allergic reactions such as latex. Exposure to these chemicals presents a unique set of risks as the allergy can develop after extended use.

*Chemical exposure can occur 4 different ways:*

* Inhalation: breathing in dusts, mists and vapors
* Ingestion: eating contaminated food (food that has been exposed to airborne contaminants)
* Absorption: skin contact with a chemical
* Injection: forcing an agent into the body through a needle or high-pressure device

*How to protect against chemical hazards:*

* Reading container labels, safety data sheets (SDSs) and safe-work instructions before handling a chemical.
* Using specified personal protective equipment (PPE) that may include chemical-splash goggles, a respirator, safety gloves, apron, or safety glasses with side shields.
* Inspect all PPE before use. Look for defects in the equipment such as cracks, missing parts, rips, etc.
* Wash hands before eating, especially after handling chemicals.

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