

Health & Safety Arrangements for Management of Health Surveillance

Managers and Employee Guidance

Introduction

Wirral Council recognises that staff can become ill because of the work they undertake. Occupational ill health is preventable and can be reduced by managers taking effective steps to control health risks at work. One of these steps is to arrange for the health surveillance of employees. This guidance gives Managers advice on what you need to do to meet the legal duty to provide health surveillance at work and the benefits of health surveillance. It outlines the health surveillance requirements of particular regulations.

Definition(s)

Health surveillance is about putting in place systematic, regular and appropriate procedures to detect early signs of work-related ill health among employees exposed to certain health risks; and acting on the results. To comply with the law, this means selecting from a range of specific techniques:

- A **'pre-screening assessment'** to be completed by employees prior to starting work to identify if they have any pre-existing health problems.
- An **'initial assessment'** carried out by a competent person in conjunction with the manager. The competent person should have the skills, knowledge and experience to know the symptoms to recognise.
- An **'Occupational Health Assessment'** carried out by a qualified person, this could involve asking employees about symptoms of ill health, or inspecting or examining individuals for signs of ill health. Examples might be someone conducting a hearing test, or an occupational health nurse carrying out a lung function test where employees regularly use certain hazardous substances.
- **'Medical surveillance'** by a doctor, which can include clinical examinations, for example to look for a reaction from exposure to some chemicals.
- **'Biological and biological effect monitoring'** to measure and assess the take up of, or the effects of, exposure to substances such as lead or other chemicals, by testing blood, urine or breath samples.

(See appendix 2)

Why Carry out Health Surveillance

The benefits of health surveillance are that it can:

- Provide information so you can detect harmful health effects at an early stage, thereby protecting employees and confirming whether they are still fit to do their jobs
- Check that control measures are working well by giving feedback on risk assessments, suggesting where further action might be needed and what it might be:
- Give employees the chance to raise any concerns about the effect of their work on their health

Managers Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of all managers to ensure that they;

- Identify the employees that may be at risk from being exposed to any specific hazards (*see appendix 1*)
- Reduce or control the risk arising from the identified hazard to such a level that it is not harmful to health (*see links to other arrangements*)
- Provide employees with information explaining the benefits of health surveillance and especially how it is not in their long term health interests to conceal symptoms (*see appendix 2-6*)
- Arrange health surveillance (via the normal occupational health referral process - M31) for employees exposed to health hazards as set out in appendix 1

Following advice from Occupational Health or your Departmental Health and Safety Officer, it is the responsibility of Managers to;

- Re-examine your risk assessment to decide whether to take action to protect the rest of the workforce then improve control measures if necessary
- Take appropriate action in response to the results of any health surveillance and monitor to ensure any existing risk controls are working
- Retain individual health surveillance records for 50 years from the date of last entry (*Send to the Corporate archive system*)
- Report any case of work related disease to your departmental Health & Safety Officer on the corporate accident/incident form (M13)
- Discuss any employee occupational ill health incapacity with Dept Human Resources Officer

Employees Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of all employees to ensure they:

- Inform their line manager of any work related health condition
- Inform their line manager of any health & safety related issues which may affect their health and safety
- Co-operate fully with any health surveillance programme and attend any health surveillance appointments
- Use any equipment, procedures, training and/or personal protective equipment, which is provided for their health & safety
- They complete an accident form (M13) identifying the work place disease or condition at the earliest sign of symptoms

Links to other policies & arrangements

These arrangements should be read in conjunction with;

- Council Health and safety policy, which identifies the roles and responsibilities of all employees and managers
- Health and Safety Management Arrangements for Risk Assessment
- Health & Safety Management Arrangements for Control of Substances Hazardous to Health
- Health & Safety Management Arrangements for Vibration Exposure
- Health & Safety Management Arrangements for Noise Exposure
- Health & Safety Management Arrangements for Accident and Incident Investigation and Reporting

Appendix 1

Ask yourself whether any of your employees is exposed to the following:

- Hazardous substances such as chemicals, solvents, fumes, dusts, gases and vapours, aerosols, biological agents (micro-organisms). If so, health surveillance may be needed under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002. *(see appendix 2 & 5)*
- Noise, (contact departmental health & safety officer for advice). If so, health surveillance may be needed under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. *(see appendix 3)*
- Hand-arm vibration (hav). Do your employees use hand held power tools, chainsaws, garden strimmers etc *(see appendix 5)*
- Shift Workers - We must offer night workers a free health assessment before they start working nights and on a regular basis while they are working nights. In many cases it will be appropriate to do this annually

**CONTACT YOUR DEPARTMENTAL HEALTH & SAFETY OFFICER FOR
ADVICE OR FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT HEALTH SURVEILLANCE
PROVISION FOR ANY OF THE ABOVE**

Appendix 2

Occupational Dermatitis Tool Box Talk

What is occupational dermatitis?

Occupational dermatitis is a skin disease that is related to work.

Common symptoms include:

- skin redness or soreness
- itching
- rash
- cracking or peeling.

Why do employees need health surveillance for dermatitis?

They are using chemical products that cause dermatitis, a common health problem. If left untreated, dermatitis can become **irreversible**, so a very small amount of a chemical can trigger a reaction. If you detect the first signs of an employee's skin disease early enough and halt exposure to the substance responsible, you will minimise the consequences. Solvents on the skin make other chemicals more likely to cause skin damage.

What is health surveillance for dermatitis?

Surveillance is collecting and using information about an employees' health and the substances used. It helps prevent dermatitis by detecting the early signs, and also keeps employees' aware of skin care and the potential for dermatitis.

Surveillance for dermatitis consists of:

- assessing employees' skin condition as soon as possible after starting work, e.g. within six weeks;
- examining the skin (usually hands and forearms) regularly, e.g. every few months, and asking employees' about their skin condition;
- keeping a record of all surveillance.

Who needs health surveillance for dermatitis?

All employees' working with UV-curable inks or isocyanates, or using products labelled R43 (may cause sensitisation by skin contact) or R42/43 (may cause sensitisation by inhalation and skin contact).

Record-keeping

Record the fact that your workers need surveillance for dermatitis as part of your risk controls in the risk assessment.

Note down the products that can cause dermatitis.

Also record:

- the employees' name, address and employee number
- the products they work with or the process, and how often they do this work;
- the protective measures used (gloves, skin creams etc);
- the date of starting work with the products or process.

Appendix 3

Noise; Tool box talk

What is noise induced hearing loss?

Hearing loss can be temporary or permanent. People often experience temporary deafness after leaving a noisy place such as a night club or a rock concert. Although hearing recovers within a few hours, these signs should not be ignored. It is a sign that if you continue to be exposed to high levels of noise your hearing could be permanently damaged.

Why do I need to do health surveillance for hearing loss?

Hearing loss is usually gradual because of prolonged exposure to noise. It may only be when damage caused by noise over years combines with hearing loss due to ageing that people realise how deaf they have become. By carrying out health surveillance we are able to identify early signs of hearing loss and implement control measures so to reduce the exposure to noise.

What is health surveillance for hearing loss?

Health surveillance for hearing damage usually means:

- regular hearing checks in controlled conditions which includes measuring hearing sensitivity over a range of sound frequencies;
- telling employees' about the results of their hearing checks;
- keeping health records;
- ensuring employees' are examined by a doctor where hearing damage is identified.

Who needs health surveillance for hearing loss?

Employers must provide health surveillance involving hearing checks for all employees' who are likely to be frequently exposed at or above either upper exposure action value, or are at risk for any other reason, for example they already suffer from hearing loss or are particularly sensitive to damage.

Record Keeping

As an employer we must;

- keep health records of the health surveillance
- make employees' records available to them;
- act upon any recommendations made by the occupational health service provider about employees' continued exposure to noise;
- ensure that any employee with suspected hearing damage is referred to a doctor, to ensure that the employee receives advice from an occupational health professional;
- use the results to review and, if necessary, revise the risk assessment and plans to control risks.

What is hand arm vibration?

Hand-arm vibration is caused by the use of vibrating hand-held tools, such as pneumatic jack hammers, drills, chain saws, garden strimmers, lawn mowers. The nature of these tools involves vibration (a rapid back and forth type of motion) which is transmitted from the tool to the hands and arms of the person holding the tool.

Why do I need to do health surveillance for hand arm vibration?

Employees' whose hands are regularly exposed to vibration may suffer from damage to the tissues of hands and arms, which cause the symptoms collectively known as HAVS.

These symptoms include:

- numbness and tingling in the fingers, and a reduced sense of touch and temperature, due to damage to nerves in the hand. This damage can make it difficult to feel, and to work with, small objects;
- periodic attacks during which the blood circulation in the fingers is impaired and parts of the fingers become white (blanched). This is sometimes known as 'vibration white finger', 'dead finger' or 'dead hand'. The main trigger for these symptoms is exposure to the cold.
- joint pain and stiffness in the hand and arm. Grip strength can be reduced due to nerve and muscle damage.

What is health surveillance for hand arm vibration?

When you plan to introduce health surveillance, explain to your employees and their safety or employee representatives what you are proposing to do. Employees need to be given information about the reasons for carrying out health surveillance and they need to understand their roles and responsibilities.

A simple approach to health surveillance involves working through a number of stages. Briefly, this 'tiered' system works as follows:

Tier 1 is a short questionnaire (**initial screening questionnaire**) used as a first check for people moving into jobs involving exposure to vibration. The replies to the questionnaire will indicate whether they need to be referred to Tier 3 for a HAVS health assessment.

Tier 2 is a short questionnaire (**annual screening questionnaire**) that you can issue once a year to employees exposed to vibration risks to check whether they need to be referred to Tier 3 for a HAVS health assessment.

Tier 3 involves a HAVS health assessment by a qualified person (e.g. an occupational health nurse). If the assessment shows that the employee has HAVS, the employee Tier 4 will apply.

Tier 4 involves a formal diagnosis and is carried out by a doctor qualified in occupational health. The doctor will advise you on the employee's fitness for work.

Tier 5 is optional and involves referral of the employee for certain tests for HAVS. The results may help the doctor assess fitness for work.

Who needs health surveillance for hand arm vibration? (See Vibration Management Arrangements)

Health surveillance should be provided for vibration-exposed employees who:

- are likely to be regularly exposed above the action value of $2.5 \text{ m/s}^2 A(8)$;
- are likely to be exposed occasionally above the action value and where the risk assessment identifies that the frequency and severity of exposure may pose a risk to health; or
- have a diagnosis of HAVS (even when exposed below the action value).

Record Keeping

You should retain a copy of each individual's health surveillance records for 50 years after the last date of entry, this should be retained in their personnel file and sent to the corporate archives. The record should be kept up to date and should include:

- identification details of the employee (name, address, employee number)
- the employee's history of exposure to vibration;
- the outcome of previous health surveillance in terms of fitness for work, and any restrictions required
- the Tier 1 and Tier 2 questionnaire results (as long as they are not confidential) even if an employee has said they have no symptoms

What is occupational asthma?

Occupational asthma is asthma that is related to work. Common symptoms include:

- recurring soreness or watering of eyes;
- recurring blocked or running nose;
- bouts of coughing and chest tightness;
- wheezing and breathlessness;
- any other persistent or history of chest problems;
- symptoms generally improving at weekends or during holidays.
- These are all symptoms of sensitisation - occupational asthma may follow.

Why do I need to do health surveillance for asthma?

Your job role involves working with dusts or substances known as respiratory sensitiser's (Risk Phrase – R42/R43). Occupational asthma is a major occupational disease with serious implications. If you detect the first signs of an employees' sensitisation early enough and take steps to halt their exposure to the substance, you will minimise the risk of asthma developing.

What is health surveillance for asthma?

Surveillance is collecting and using information about workers' health and the substances used. It helps prevent asthma developing by detecting the early signs, and also keeps workers aware of the need to maintain and use controls.

Health surveillance for asthma for workers using respiratory sensitiser's consists of:

- assessing workers' lung function before they start a relevant job;
- ensuring a regular (at least annual) questionnaire and lung function test
- by an occupational doctor or nurse;
- keeping a health record;
- monitoring sickness absence.

Who needs surveillance for asthma?

Everyone working with substances labelled R42/R43 'May cause sensitisation by inhalation' (which means may cause asthma), or 'May cause sensitisation by inhalation and skin contact'.

Record Keeping

Record the fact that your workers need surveillance for asthma because they are using products which are respiratory sensitiser's. Note down these products.

Also record:

- the employees' name, address and employee number;
- the products they work with or the process, and how often they do this work;
- the control measures used (fume extraction, respiratory protective equipment, etc);
- the date of starting work with the products or process.