



# OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE PROVISION

Version - Updated September 2020

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# Introduction

Employers have a legal obligation to safeguard the health and well-being of people at work, and those who may be affected by the work, e.g. visitors and contractors. However, there is no specific requirement in UK law for an employer to buy in or provide occupational health services. Instead, the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require employers to appoint competent persons to enable them to fulfil their statutory responsibilities. In some cases, this may require personnel or consultants with specialist professional qualifications in occupational health.

The exact services provided will depend on the:

- health risks;
- number of personnel involved; and
- nature of the business.

## Effects of Work on Health and the Prevention of Occupational Disease

The effects of work on health and the prevention of occupational disease cover:

- sudden damage to health – typically as a result of an accident or injury in the workplace or exposure to a toxic substance or irritant
- long-term ill health – as a result of exposure to a health hazard over a long period of time.

In practice, employers need to identify:

- the hazards to health in the workplace
- the control measures in place to reduce, so far as is practicable, the risk of injury to employees from any aspect of work, i.e. what employees do, what tools, equipment or substances they use to do their work, and how they carry out their work activities.

## Effects of Health on Work

The assessment of job-fit – how suitable the job is to the worker, as well as how suitable the worker

is for the job – should form an essential element of recruitment and human resources practice.

In practice, employers need to consider:

- the physical and mental health demands of the job – what the employee will be exposed to in terms of physical demand and mental pressures
- whether the job carries any specific risk to employees with particular health problems, and if so, what special arrangements need to be made to assess the health of employees before employment
- informing employees and prospective employees of the demands of the job, any specific risks and any mandatory health assessments
- providing ongoing, adequate and appropriate training.



## Rehabilitation and Return to Work After Illness, Injury or Other Absence

The earlier and the more actively an absence from work is managed, the more likely it is that the employee will return promptly.

In practice, employers need to:

- maintain regular contact with the employee, understanding the reason for absence, and working towards a prompt and safe return to work
- identify any modifications to the job on either a temporary or permanent basis that will facilitate a return to work
- obtain adequate information on the effects of the illness in relation to the employee's ability to return to the job – without breaching medical confidentiality
- take action, where appropriate, to reduce the risks to the employee and others of the incident, which led to the absence, from recurring.

## Assisting the Disabled to Access Work

In practice, employers should:

- obtain expert advice from an occupational health provider on the employment of disabled people, whether for a new appointment or because an existing employee has become disabled
- work with the disabled employee to clarify what modifications might be needed to enable them to undertake the work activity
- use the risk assessment process to identify both the health risks to the individual and the control measures necessary to ensure their health in work
- provide appropriate support and training for the disabled person, and their work colleagues,
- to maintain his or her health in work.

The Government is keen to assist employers in the employment of disabled people and will provide grants for practical support that will help a disabled person do their job. Funding is provided through the [Access to Work scheme](#).

## Managing Work-related Aspects of Illness with Multiple Causations

Managing illnesses that are partially caused or aggravated by work almost always requires the involvement of specialist health advisors.

The focus of the specialist involvement should be the management of the individual in relation to work, either at a preventative level or when the health problem is affecting the employee's ability to work.

## Occupational Health Support

In practice, most employers need sector-specific guidance on practical measures to reduce employee exposure to health hazards and ways of helping employees with health problems to continue working.



Appropriate guidance can be obtained from:

- acas
- the HSE
- local authorities, particularly enforcing officers such as environmental health officers
- technicians
- engineers
- suppliers of goods, materials and equipment – including written material in brochures, handbooks and on material safety data sheets
- trade associations
- Local business forums
- trade unions, including safety representatives
- professional bodies, e.g. IOSH.

BFFF have also produced guidance on Health Surveillance for Cold Store Workers, Rest Breaks for Cold Store Workers and working in a Cold Store Environment – Advice for Employees, which can be accessed here: <http://bfff.co.uk/health-safety/guidance/>

### Costs of Occupational Health

Most companies cannot fully account for the costs of ill health. Because of this, companies that introduce occupational health schemes can find it difficult to justify the cost, particularly in the short term. In the longer term, efficient management of absences, reduction in the risk of claims for occupational injury or disease, and improved performance and productivity offset the expenditure on service provision.



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VAT Reg. No. GB 115 5466 23

