

LAUNCH OF NEW HSE HEALTH SURVEILLANCE WEBPAGES

14 March 2013

A large percentage of GP consultations are due to work related health problems. This is not surprising when the Labour Force Survey confirms that an estimated 1.2 million people who worked in 2010/11 report suffering from a work-related illness, of which 495,000 were new cases which developed in the year, primarily musculoskeletal disorders or stress, depression and anxiety, skin disease, respiratory disease, hearing loss and vibration related disorders.

There are also over 12,000 work-related deaths each year primarily owing to past exposure to chemicals and dust <http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/cost.htm>

The main thrust of health and safety law in Great Britain is to assess risks and to apply and maintain appropriate control measures. Health surveillance, where it is needed, should be triggered through the risk assessment process and the results should feed back into that process for use in conjunction with other information e.g. any monitoring results, to help identify where improved control measures may be needed? In this way health surveillance can play a key role in preventing work-related ill health. In reality only a small fraction of the workers who should receive health surveillance actually receive it, and sometimes employers who have identified a need for health surveillance overspend through unnecessary blanket provision.

The HSE has carried out research, including a workshop for external expert stakeholders to identify the difficulties in understanding this topic and to gather views on how, jointly, we can help? One important key message was that we needed a web-based product to better show to a wider audience of employers what health surveillance is, its connection to risk assessment, and importance in the overall health risk management processes.

Legal requirements for health surveillance only apply under specific circumstances but where they do apply, such surveillance should form an integral part of the employer's risk management processes, and employees should be engaged. All too often we find that where health surveillance is provided it stands alone and therefore both the employee's health and consequently the business, may fail to reap the potential benefits from the investment in health surveillance.

Employers and others, which include doctors and in particular GPs with an interest, should use the new web-based portal and guidance on occupational health surveillance on the [HSE website](#). The launch date was 14 March 2013. The new guidance will help employers to improve their management and control of health risks by making clearer what health surveillance is; when health surveillance is needed; how it protects health, and who can deliver it? The guidance makes it easier for employers to decide whether any workers actually need health surveillance and what form that should take.

The guidance also makes clear that health surveillance is not a substitute for other actions such as improved processes or control of exposure.

If you are a GP or a hospital-based doctor we think this portal will be helpful to you and your patients when considering a possible case of work-related ill health.

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