

Health and Safety Management in Healthcare Information Sheet

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This information sheet gives guidance on the key elements of health and safety management in healthcare. It is intended for small employers in the healthcare sector, e.g. small residential care providers and small healthcare practices.



Duties of Employers and Employees

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 (2005 Act) sets out the main legal provisions for securing and improving the safety, health and welfare of people at work. The 2005 Act places duties on employers and employees, this includes;

Employers (the term includes self employed persons) are required to manage health and safety in the workplace and to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare of employees and others at the workplace.

Employees are required to ensure that they take reasonable care to protect their own safety, health and welfare and that of any other person who may be affected by their acts or omissions. Employees must co-operate with the employer to ensure safety, health and welfare at work and report to their employer anything potentially dangerous at work of which they become aware.

Managing Health and Safety

The 2005 Act emphasises the need for employers to manage safety, health and welfare at work in

order to prevent workplace injuries and ill health. This involves an initial review of the arrangements in place to secure safety, health and welfare. It includes developing a health and safety policy which confirms the employer and management's commitment to ensuring a healthy and safe place to work. It involves identifying standards to be achieved, how this will be done and monitoring and reviewing performance.

The basis for the management of health and safety is the written safety statement. The safety statement must be based on the identification of hazards and the assessment of risk as described in the section below on Risk Management.

Safety Statement

The safety statement must specify how the safety, health and welfare of employees will be secured and managed and include;

- The health and safety policy confirming the employer and management commitment to ensuring safety, health and welfare at work.
- The duties of employers and employees with regard to safety, health and welfare.
- The responsibilities of key personnel (include names and where applicable job title/position) with regard to safety, health and welfare e.g. the responsibilities of the senior manager/director of nursing etc. It is important to ensure that there are clear lines of responsibility and good awareness of responsibilities allocated.
- The arrangements for consultation with employees and arrangements for communicating health and safety information.
- Include emergency plans such as evacuation procedures, incident reporting arrangements etc.
- A written risk assessment, this is the key part of the safety statement where the work related hazards have been identified and the associated risks have been assessed and documented. The control measures to eliminate or reduce the risk must also be identified.
- Any other arrangements for securing safety, health and welfare at work and the resources provided such as arrangements for occupational health expertise, immunisation arrangements for employees and health surveillance, arrangements for working with contractors and/or others who share the building, etc.

The safety statement should be signed by the responsible person e.g. employer/senior manager and dated. The safety statement must be kept up to date (reviewed at least annually but more often if required e.g. if there are changes at the workplace which might affect worker's health and safety) and brought to the attention of all staff and others at the workplace who may be exposed to the risks to which the safety statement applies.

Risk Management

Risk Management is essentially a 3 step process

- ▶ Hazard Identification
- ▶ Risk Assessment
- ▶ Controls

Some risk assessments may be simple and arise directly from observation such as obstructions in the corridor creating a tripping hazard. Some hazards may be more complex, for example the risks associated with certain patient manual handling activities.

An employer can prepare their own safety statement and their own risk assessments if they (or those allocated the duty) know what is involved and have knowledge and experience of the work activities and potential hazards. Employees and the safety representatives should be consulted with and involved in the risk assessment process. But the employer is responsible for seeing that the work is adequately done.

If an external advisor is appointed to develop a safety statement it is important to ensure that the person appointed has a good understanding of the work activities and has sufficient training, experience and knowledge to undertake the work. Ensure that any safety statement and risk assessment prepared is specific to the workplace and the work activities in that workplace.

Where there is not sufficient competence in-house with regard to safety, health and welfare matters the services of a competent person must be obtained.

Step 1: Hazard Identification

Identify the hazards associated with the workplace and the work activities. A hazard is anything that may cause harm. Concentrate on the significant hazards, those that can cause serious harm or affect many people.

Employers will be familiar with the hazards associated with the type of work they are involved in but the following measures will also be helpful in ensuring that the main hazards have been included;

- Walk around the workplace and look at what could reasonably be expected to cause harm.
- Ask employees or their representatives what they think. They may have noticed things that are not immediately obvious to you.
- If you are a member of a professional organisation or a similar body, contact them, many produce very helpful guidance.
- Check manufacturers' instructions or data sheets for equipment and chemicals as they can be very helpful in spelling out the hazards and identifying safe work practices and putting them in their true perspective.
- Have a look back at work related accident and ill-health records - these often help to identify the less obvious hazards.
- Remember to think about long-term hazards to health (e.g. harmful effects of repeated exposure to chemicals which may cause skin irritations and/or sensitisation).
- Consult the HSA website for further information on specific topics.
- Consider best practice guidelines produced by responsible organisations.

Hazards may be considered under the headings of physical, chemical, biological and human factor hazards. Some examples are given below –

Physical Hazards

- Manual handling activities involving heavy, awkward or hard to reach loads.
- Equipment which has been poorly maintained, is used incorrectly, not suitable for the task.
- Slipping and tripping hazards such as wet or poorly maintained floors.

- Hazards associated with driving for work such as poorly maintained work vehicles.

Chemical hazards – chemical substances include cleaning, disinfecting, sterilising agents, medical gases, etc. Every chemical must have a corresponding safety data sheet and these should be obtained from the manufacturer or supplier. The safety data sheet and the product label will help you to identify any hazards and controls associated with the use of the chemical.

Biological hazards – these include any viruses and bacteria that can cause infection, e.g. exposure to blood and body fluids, exposure to airborne pathogens such as tuberculosis and legionnaires disease. The employer is required to carry out a risk assessment to assess any risk to the health and safety of an employee from exposure to a biological agent (actual or potential) at work.

Human factor hazards – people should be mentally and physically capable of doing their job.

The workplace, the work system, the organisation of work and the job should be designed so as to avoid causing sustained stress. Workers should be protected from bullying, harassment and violence. Hazards associated with dealing with service users with aggressive behaviour should be considered.

It is important to decide who might be harmed and how, consider the various categories of staff who may be exposed, the service users and those who may not be in the workplace all the time, e.g. visitors, contractors, cleaning staff, students, members of the public or people who share the workplace. Consider those who may be more vulnerable such as pregnant women, people with different abilities or disabilities, new or inexperienced workers, workers whose first language is not English. Consider lone workers, night workers and shift workers.

Step 2: Assessing risk

Risk is the likelihood, great or small, that someone will be harmed by the hazard, together with the severity of the harm suffered.

In assessing risk you should estimate;

- how likely it is that a hazard will cause harm;
- how serious that harm is likely to be;
- how often and how many people are exposed;
- what control measures are already in place.

Consider what further controls may be necessary to prevent harm. You can also decide if any corrective actions are especially urgent and prioritise them.

There are specific regulations relating to risk assessments for certain types of hazards at work, including manual and patient handling risk assessments, hazardous chemicals, biological agents, display screen equipment and carcinogens and risk assessments for pregnant employees. The HSA website has further information relating to these areas.



Step 3: Controls

Employers may already have some safety measures in place, the risk assessment will tell whether these are adequate. Employers are required to do all that is reasonably practicable to minimise the risk of injury. Consider firstly if the hazard can be removed and if not consider what precautions are necessary to control the risk.

Record the findings

The risk assessments must be in writing and form part of the safety statement.

The safety statement and risk assessments may refer to specific procedures which are detailed in other documents such as operating instructions for equipment, infection control manuals and patient risk assessments. The employer can decide whether to combine these documents or whether it is more helpful to keep them separately, which may be the case if the information should be readily accessible near the work activity. But the employer must make sure employees are made aware of the risks and precautions and know how to access the relevant health and safety information.

Review and Update

It must be ensured that risk assessments are kept up to date. Check the risk assessments and where necessary, amend them. Consider incident reports and near misses when reviewing risk assessments.

Measuring Performance

Health and safety performance should be monitored and evaluated and compliance with legal requirements must be ensured. There must be a good fit between what you say you do (policies, procedures, safety statement, etc) and what you do in reality and there should be a review mechanism in place to ensure that the good fit is maintained into the future. Measuring performance may include taking account of trends in accidents and incidents, progress with compliance with training requirements, progress with implementation of additional control measures identified through the risk assessment process, etc. Make sure you are continuously improving and that the system for managing safety, health and welfare is effective.

Duties of Employers to People who are not in their Employment

Employers have responsibilities for the health and safety of people who do not work for them but may be affected by their work place or work activities and there must be procedures in place to ensure their health and safety. This may include service users, visitors, volunteers and contractors.

Examples of where people may be affected by the undertaking are;

- Unsafe premises causing injury or harm to a service user or other person such as a trip on an uneven floor surface.
- Contractors not informed of the location of asbestos or fragile roof.

Co-operation and Co-ordination with Contractors and Others

When employing a contractor (e.g. a building contractor) employers must make enquiries about the contractor's procedures including health and safety. Employers must assess the contractor's safety statement or their method statement with reference to the work to be carried out and check how the contractor will integrate their safety arrangements with that of the healthcare facility.

Where two employers (including a contractor) share a workplace there must be co-operation and co-ordination with regard to ensuring compliance with health and safety legislation. Relevant extracts of the safety statement relating to hazards and risks must be exchanged so that employers and employees are aware of any risks which may affect them.

Consultation with Employees

Employers must consult their employees with regard to safety, health and welfare at work and provide them with certain information on these matters, including the results of risk assessments.

Consultation on health and safety matters between employers and employees helps to ensure co-operation in the prevention of accidents and ill-health.

As part of the consultation process, employees have the right to select safety representative(s). The employer must recognise the rights and entitlements of a safety representative.

Consultation arrangements may include a safety committee. Details must be included in the safety statement including the name of the safety representative(s) and members of the safety committee if appointed.

Instruction, Training and Supervision

The employer must ensure that managers and employees have suitable instruction, training and supervision in order to do the job safely. Induction should include the key elements of the safety statement, fire and emergency procedures and health and safety related policies and procedures.



Job analysis and risk assessment should identify where specific training is required, such as skills required for dealing with aggressive people, manual handling, etc. Employees' understanding of the training received should be assessed and training programs should be evaluated. Refresher training may be needed to ensure that staff maintain their skills.

Reporting and Investigating Incidents

It must be the policy in the workplace that all employees and any others working on the premises report to the person in charge any work related accident, incident or near miss event, without unreasonable delay.

There are a number of reasons for having reporting procedures in place;

- It ensures that any person suffering injury or ill health can be attended to.
- It allows the workplace or activity to be made safe and prevent recurrence
- It allows the facts of the incident to be established and recorded in the event of any legal proceedings and determines if any further reporting is required.

It is a legal requirement that certain work related accidents and dangerous occurrences are reported to the Health and Safety Authority. With regard to accidents, where an employee is absent for 3 consecutive days or more (not including the date of the accident) due to an injury sustained in the course of their employment, the incident must be reported to the HSA. This can be done online on the HSA website or by completing an IR1 form. Dangerous occurrences are reported on an IR3 form. Work related fatalities must be reported to the HSA immediately by phone in the first instance and then on an IR1 form. Further information on reporting incidents can be found on the HSA website.

Further Information:

- The Health and Safety Authority's web site **www.hsa.ie**.
- Contact the Health and Safety Authority at **wcu@hsa.ie** or LoCall **1890 289 389**.

