

Occupational Health Service

Information Sheet for Employees

HEALTH SURVEILLANCE FOR HAND-ARM VIBRATION SYNDROME

What is HAVS?

If you are exposed regularly to vibration you may suffer from damage to the nerves, blood vessels, muscles and joints of the hand, wrist and arm which cause symptoms collectively known as Hand-Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVS). One of the symptoms was formally known as vibration white finger (VWF).

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome is a disorder of the hand and arm which has a number of causes but can be associated with exposure to vibration. It may include the following symptoms: tingling, numbness, pains and weakness.

What are the symptoms of HAVS?

If you have HAVS, then you may experience some or all of the following symptoms:

- Numbness and tingling in the fingers
- Loss of sense of touch
- Reduced temperature
- Loss of strength in your hands
- Attacks of reduced blood circulation and parts of the fingers become white, then red and painful as the blood returns (this is known as vibration white finger). This occurs mainly when you are exposed to cold or wet
- Joint pains and stiffness in hand and arm

Why do I need health surveillance for Hand-Arm Vibration Syndrome?

The aim of health surveillance is to have procedures in place to detect work-related ill health at an early stage and act on the results; to protect your health and to check the effectiveness of the control measures that are in place for your health and safety. As you have been identified as working with tools that produce vibration you are covered by The Control of Vibration at Work Regulations 2005.

Health surveillance for HAVS helps raise your awareness of HAVS and help you to be able to recognise the first symptoms of HAVS. Hand-arm vibration is vibration transmitted into your hands and arms when you use hand-held powered work equipment. Over exposure to hand-arm vibration can cause hand-arm vibration syndrome (HAVS) and carpal tunnel syndrome which can result in a disabling loss of hand function.

On cessation of exposure to vibration, health surveillance should continue for 1 year after the date of cessation. Legislation requires that health surveillance health records are confidentially stored for 40 years after cessation of exposure or when an employee leaves the University of Strathclyde.

What is involved in HAVS health surveillance?

The health surveillance programme is based on the Health and Safety Executive tiered system, as advised by the HSE in the Guidance to the Regulations.

- **Baseline (Tier 1):** you will be issued with a baseline health questionnaire form – this is used as a first check. You will bring the questionnaire with you when you attend the Occupational Health Service for an appointment with an Occupational Health Nurse. At this appointment we will discuss the information that you have provided and this will allow you to discuss any concerns you may have about your health relating to exposure to hand-arm vibration. If at this stage there are concerns that you may have signs/symptoms of HAVS then you will be referred to the doctor for further assessment and clinical examination.
- **Annual (Tier 2):** an annual health questionnaire will be sent out to you for completion. You will then return it to the Occupational Health Service in the envelope provided so that it remains confidential. If there are any changes in your symptoms recorded on the questionnaire you may be requested to attend Occupational Health. At this stage it may be necessary to carry out a HAVS health assessment (Tier 3). Every 3rd year you will attend Occupational Health for a face to face appointment with the nurse.
- **HAVS health assessment (Tier 3):** this assessment includes a clinical assessment and examination by Occupational Health Physician. If this assessment indicates that you may have Hand-Arm Vibration Syndrome, further assessment and examinations may be required.

Occupational Health will advise you of any concerns with your health and with your consent advise your GP.

Occupational Health will also advise your line manager that you are fit to work with hand-held vibrating tools or if any adjustments to your work are required. No medical information will be passed to your department without your written consent and this is only requested when deemed necessary for your health and safety.

What else can I do?

- Recognise the early signs and symptoms of HAVS.
- Report any symptoms to your supervisor and the Occupational Health Service as early as possible.
- Comply with the control measures your employer has put in place to reduce the risk of HAVS.

Further information is available from the Occupational Health Service, Level 1 Livingstone Tower, telephone 0141 548 4824, email occupationalhealth@strath.ac.uk .