



# Health and Safety Training

A guide to providing information, instruction and training to staff

March 2022



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#### Subscription rates:

UK members: £40  
UK non-members: £60  
International members: £100  
International non-members: £150

# Introduction

To prevent work-related injuries and ill health, it is vital all workers have the necessary information, knowledge and competence to enable them to work without posing a risk to themselves or others, such as their colleagues.

To ensure this, UK employers have a legal duty to provide whatever information, instruction, training and supervision is necessary to ensure (so far as is reasonably practicable), the health and safety of their employees at work.

This guide explains some of the key legal duties to provide health and safety information, instruction and training to employees and others such as contractors. It also provides some advice on appropriate ways of delivering health and safety information, instruction and training.

## Thomas Tevlin

Editor



The Guide is published by the British Safety Council,  
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# Health and Safety Training

**A**n essential feature of an effective health and safety management system is ensuring all workers understand how to carry out their work without posing a risk to either their own or others' health and safety and are fully committed to doing so.

In fact, providing safe systems of work and suitable equipment – such as safety guards on machines and personal hearing protection in noisy environments – will not be enough to keep people safe and healthy unless everyone is given suitable and appropriate information, instruction and training on the likely hazards and risks and how to eliminate, avoid or control them.

As a result, the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (HSWA) requires all UK employers to provide “such information, instruction, training and supervision as is necessary to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable” the health and safety at work of their employees.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) says that as well helping to prevent accidents and ill health by ensuring workers have the knowledge to work safely, providing adequate health and safety information and training can help to create a positive safety culture, where safe and healthy working becomes second nature to all.

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## What the law says

As stated, the HSWA 1974 requires all employers to provide whatever

information, instruction, training and supervision is necessary to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety at work of their employees.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 build on this by requiring employers to provide their employees with “comprehensible and relevant” information on:

- The risks and hazards they may face at work, as identified by the employer's risk assessment
- The preventive and protective measures that are in place, or will be introduced, to eliminate or reduce the risks
- The steps to take if they encounter risks or hazards, and how to work safely
- The responsibilities of employees to comply with site rules and safe working procedures

**“Adequate health and safety information and training can help to create a positive safety culture.”**

# Some facts and numbers

**1.7**

million workers in Britain suffering from work-related ill health (new or long standing cases) in 2020/21 (LFS)



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**441,000**

workers in Britain suffered a non-fatal injury at work in 2020-21 (LFS)

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**822,000**

workers in Britain suffered work-related stress, depression or anxiety in 2020/21 (LFS)

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**12,000**

lung disease deaths each year estimated to be linked to past exposures at work in Britain

Sources: HSE/Labour Force Survey (LFS - estimates based on self-reports by workers) 2020/21, [hse.gov.uk/statistics](https://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics)

## Health and Safety Training



Employees must be given appropriate health and safety training when they first start work for an employer.

- The procedures to follow in the event of an emergency or a dangerous situation, such as fire alert, explosion, chemical spill, security alert or dangerous electrical fault.

The Management Regulations also set out some specific situations where adequate health and safety training must be provided to employees. These are:

- When employees first start work for the employer
- If employees are exposed to new or increased risks – for example, following a change to their role or working environment, or the introduction of new or altered equipment or technology.

The Management Regulations also require employers to repeat employees' health and safety training "periodically

where appropriate". This generally means refresher training will be required if, for example, employees' skills or knowledge have become rusty or need updating.

Crucially, the Management Regulations also require employers to take account of employees' "capabilities as regards health and safety" when entrusting them with tasks. By implication, this means considering factors such as the employee's existing knowledge and understanding of hazards, risks and safe working practices; and whether the individual's language, literacy or numeracy skills could affect their ability to understand instructions and work safely.

Employers must also provide health and safety training to employees free of charge and it must take place during working hours.

It is also vital to remember that, although the law only requires health and safety training to be provided to employees, under the Management Regulations all people working for an employer or workers visiting their site – such as temporary staff and contractors – must be given adequate and appropriate health and safety information and instruction by the host or main employer. This must include information about the hazards and risks they face; the precautions in place to deal with the risks and how to follow them; and the emergency procedures to follow.

As a result, employers need to consider whether non-employees working for them or present on their site require appropriate health and safety information and instruction.

By law, any health and safety information given to employees and others such as visiting contractors must be “comprehensible” – meaning it must be easy to understand and follow.

There are also various UK safety regulations that require employers to provide employees (and sometimes others,) with suitable health and safety information, instruction and training when undertaking specific tasks and when faced by certain hazards and risks.

For example, under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health 2002, employees at risk of exposure to hazardous substances – such as chemicals and dusts – must be given appropriate information, instruction and training on the health risks from these substances and the precautions to follow.

HSE guidance on legislation, such as on the Manual Handling Regulations, also stresses the importance of providing employees with suitable information and training to enable them to avoid the risk of injury or ill health from the relevant task or hazard, such as manual handling.

This guide provides some general advice on when and how to provide information, instruction and training for certain hazards and risks. It is largely based on guidance from the HSE. However, much more detailed advice on providing health and safety training can be found on the websites of organisations like reputable health, safety and wellbeing associations and membership bodies, and industry trade associations. See the back pages for some suggested sources.

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## **Worker involvement**

The requirement to provide appropriate health and safety information, instruction and training to employees is closely linked to another duty imposed on all UK employers – to consult employees on matters affecting their health and safety.

By law, employers must consult all their employees – and/or the employee safety representatives (if present) – on anything at work that could substantially affect employees’ health and safety. The idea is that by giving employees suitable information about the hazards and risks – and allowing them to raise concerns, suggest solutions and influence decisions on the best ways of reducing the risks – employers can develop the most practical and effective risk controls.

## Health and Safety Training

HSE says consulting and involving employees in managing risks can lead to better decisions about health and safety. For example, because staff usually have a good understanding of the hazards they are therefore well-placed to provide useful feedback on the effectiveness of the existing and proposed risk controls. HSE adds that if employees are actively involved in drawing up and deciding on the safety procedures, they are more likely to understand the need for them and be committed to following them.

There are two key sets of regulations that require organisations to consult their workforce on health and safety matters.

In workplaces where the employer recognises trade unions (and trade unions are recognised for collective bargaining purposes), the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977 apply. If so, the union can decide to appoint health and safety representatives. If the union does this, the employer must consult the union safety reps on health and safety matters affecting the employees they represent.

In workplaces where employees are not in a trade union; a union is present but the employer does not recognise it; a union is recognised but has decided not to appoint union safety representatives; or a union is recognised by the employer but those employees who are not members of the union do not want the union to represent them on health and safety matters; the Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations 1996 apply. In these circumstances, employers can choose to

consult employees directly as individuals; through elected safety representatives; or through a combination of the two, depending on what is appropriate.

The law requires employers to consult employees (and/or safety representatives), about anything at work that could substantially affect employees' health and safety. Therefore, employees and reps must be consulted on:

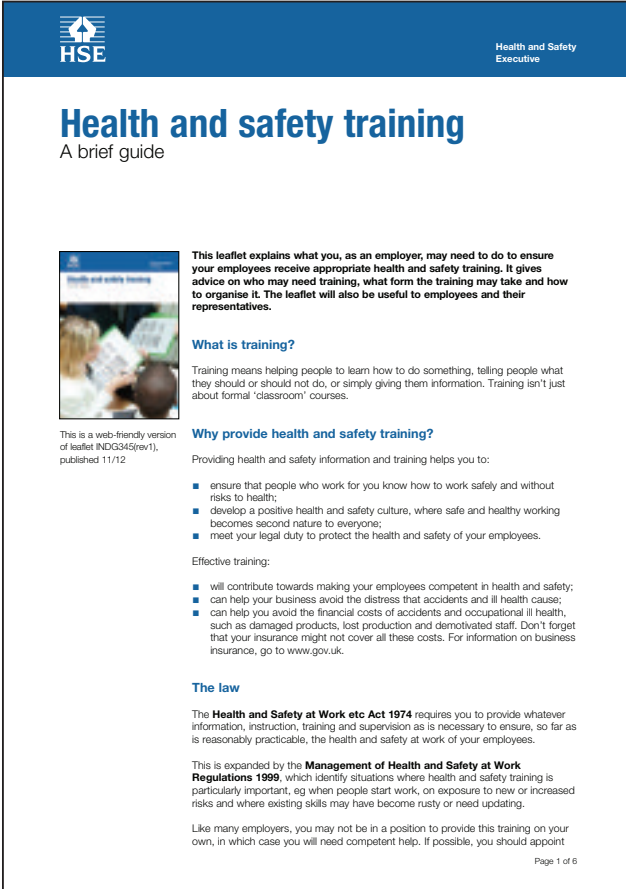
- Any change which may have a substantial effect on employees' health and safety – for example, new or different procedures, types of work, equipment, premises and ways of working, such as shift patterns
- The employer's arrangements for getting competent people to help the organisation to comply with health and safety law (a competent person is someone who has the necessary knowledge, skills and experience to help an employer comply with their health and safety legal duties)
- The information the employer must give to their employees on the likely risks arising from the work and the preventive and protective measures they should follow (employers should discuss with employees and/or their representatives the best way for this information to be shared)
- The planning and organisation of health and safety training that must be provided to all employees
- The health and safety consequences of introducing new technology.

HSE urges all employers to create a genuine partnership between themselves and their employees and



## Free guidance:

A range of free guidance on providing health and safety information and training is available from organisations like HSE, health, safety and wellbeing advisory bodies, and trade associations.



The screenshot shows the first page of a leaflet titled "Health and safety training" with the subtitle "A brief guide". The HSE logo is in the top left, and "Health and Safety Executive" is in the top right. The main heading is "Health and safety training" in blue. Below it is a small image of people in a training session. To the right of the image is a summary paragraph: "This leaflet explains what you, as an employer, may need to do to ensure your employees receive appropriate health and safety training. It gives advice on who may need training, what form the training may take and how to organise it. The leaflet will also be useful to employees and their representatives." Below this are sections: "What is training?" (defining training as helping people learn), "Why provide health and safety training?" (listing reasons like ensuring safety, developing a positive culture, and meeting legal duties), "Effective training:" (listing benefits like competency, avoiding accidents, and reducing costs), "The law" (referencing the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999), and a note about appointing competent help. A footer indicates "Page 1 of 6".

**HSE's guidance is at:**  
[hse.gov.uk](https://www.hse.gov.uk)

safety representatives when managing health and safety risks. It says employers and employees should talk, listen and co-operate with each other to identify joint solutions to problems and reach decisions together. Consultation must therefore be a two-way process, where the employer listens to and takes account of what staff say before making any health and safety decisions.

However, HSE says consultation and involvement does not remove the right of employers to make decisions about ways of managing risks. The employer is still responsible for making the final decision – but must consult employees and consider their views before deciding how best to protect their health and safety.

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**For more guidance on consulting and involving workers, see:**  
[hse.gov.uk/involvement](https://www.hse.gov.uk/involvement)

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## Training: the basic steps

HSE has published general, introductory advice on how to provide effective health and safety information, instruction, training and supervision to workers. It also provides detailed guidance on how to adequately inform and train workers on the health and safety procedures to follow when facing specific hazards and risks – such as hazardous substances, loud noise and work at height.

HSE's leaflet, [Health and safety training – a brief guide](#), suggests taking a five-step approach to planning and providing information and training.

The first step is to decide which

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employees – and, if appropriate others, such as contractors – require information and training and what it should cover.

All UK employers are legally required to assess the health and safety risks their work could pose to their staff and others. The idea is to identify the potential hazards; who could be harmed by them and how; and the best ways or eliminating or controlling the risk of injury and ill health. The results of the risk assessment(s) should therefore be used to identify the knowledge and skills employees and others will need to work in a safe and healthy fashion. Employers should also consider if safety law requires them to provide specific information and training – such as training for workplace first aiders or operators of machinery or mobile plant, such as lift trucks.

The knowledge and skills needed for employees to work in safe manner should then be compared with employees' current understanding and skills to spot any gaps that need to be addressed.

Employers must remember they have a legal duty to consult their employees and/or the employee safety representatives on the planning and organisation of the health and safety training that will be provided to employees. The idea is that, by consulting those who undertake the work, employers can increase the chance of the information and training being relevant and effective.

HSE says as a general rule, the following people should receive suitable information, instruction and – if appropriate – training:

- **The employer** – so they understand

how to identify hazards and control risks at work, and how to consult employees on health and safety issues

- **Managers and supervisors** – so they understand what is expected of them in terms of managing health and safety
- **Employees** – so they understand how to work safely and how to report health and safety concerns to their managers
- **Contractors and self-employed people working for the employer or present on site** – they may need information and instruction so they are aware of any specific hazards and the precautions to follow.

The second step is to decide on the training priorities. HSE says that, in general, employers should prioritise training for situations where a lack of information and competence could result in serious harm, and where people have particular needs – such as new recruits, young workers and staff taking on new responsibilities.

The third step is to decide on the most suitable and effective methods of providing information and training.

There are a variety of possible training methods, including face-to-face or written information or instruction; coaching or 'on-the-job' training; short talks on specific safe working practices ('toolbox talks'); 'classroom' courses; and computer-based or e-learning. HSE says training can often be delivered effectively in-house by the employer's own staff, providing the trainer has the necessary knowledge and competence. If necessary, employers can also use external help, such as training providers.

The fourth step is to deliver the training, ensuring the information is easy-to-understand and follow, and the fifth step is to check the training has worked. According to HSE, typical issues to consider when assessing the effectiveness of training include whether staff are actually working as they have been instructed to; there has been a positive change in behaviour and practice; and there has been an improvement in the organisation's health and safety performance.

HSE says employers should take a proportionate approach when providing information and training. For example, it says that a low-risk business will probably not need to provide lengthy technical training and providing simple information and instructions might be sufficient.

The regulator adds that keeping records of the training provided can help an employer to manage their training programme. Employers should also monitor their training records as part of the measures they adopt to help identify if and when refresher training is needed.

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## **New starters**

HSE warns workers are at particular risk of injury in the first six months of a job – because of factors like their possible lack of familiarity with the environment and the hazards. Therefore, employers should assess the capabilities of new workers – such as their relevant work experience and any issues around their literacy, language and numeracy skills – and provide them with adequate information,

instruction, training and supervision to enable them to work safely.

All employees must be provided with adequate health and safety induction training when they first start work. The content and extent of an induction will depend on a number of factors, including the nature of the hazards and the starter's capabilities, such as their familiarity with the tasks. As a result, there is no mandatory list of topics for an induction and employers should instead use their risk assessments and their assessment of the worker's knowledge and capabilities to decide on the information and training to provide. However, a health and safety induction should generally cover:

- The risks that new workers may be exposed to and the precautions they must take to avoid those risks
- The general health, safety and emergency arrangements – such as the nature and location of any first aid equipment and personnel, and the fire and emergency procedures to follow
- Employees' responsibilities under health and safety law – including taking care of their own and others' health and safety; following the training they have been given when using any work items provided to them; co-operating with their employer on health and safety; and reporting any situations at work that pose a serious and imminent risk to people.

Other measures HSE suggests taking to protect new workers include:

- Taking time to walk around the workplace or site with the new workers to highlight the main hazards and risks

- Ensuring workers know why and how to report any health and safety concerns or hazards
- Checking workers have understood the information, instruction and training and are following it, especially during the vital first days and weeks.

Employers must remember that young people can be at particular risk of injury or ill health due to factors such as their possible lack of awareness of hazards and their inexperience. As a result, employers should make the training and supervision of young workers a priority.

As with anyone starting work, young workers – including those on work experience – must be provided with adequate health and safety information and training before they begin their employment. The Management Regulations specifically require employers to ensure young workers (defined as those aged under 18), are not exposed to health and safety risks due to their possible lack of experience; lack of awareness of existing or potential risks; and/or lack of maturity. As part of this, employers must take into account certain factors and hazards when assessing the risks to young workers. This includes considering the extent of the training that needs to be provided to ensure the person can work safely.

Employers must also provide adequate supervision for all their employees (and, if necessary, contractors under their control), to ensure their health and safety. HSE says adequate supervision can help an employer to check workers have fully understood the training given and are

following the correct safety procedures. It adds that new, inexperienced or young people are very likely to need more supervision than others.

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## Fire safety

One topic that must by law be covered in an induction is fire safety and the action employees and others should take in the event of similar types of emergency – such as a security alert or chemical spill.

Under UK fire safety law, the responsible person for a workplace or site the public have access to must establish adequate fire safety measures – both to prevent fires and to eliminate or minimise the risk of injury or loss of life if a fire was to break out. This includes drawing up an emergency plan setting out how people will be warned in the event of a fire and how the site will be safely evacuated.

The responsible person (generally the employer), must also provide employees (and, where necessary others such as contractors), with adequate information, instruction and training on the fire risks, fire precautions and emergency procedures to follow. As a result, all employees – and others such as contractors – should be given appropriate information and instruction on:

- The risks to them identified by the fire risk assessment
- The measures in place to reduce the fire risks
- The procedures to follow if there is a fire, including how to safely escape from the building or site
- The procedures for fighting a fire

- The people nominated to oversee certain fire safety functions – such as fire marshalls in charge of the evacuation.

This information should be provided to employees and others as soon as they start work and, where appropriate, at regular intervals afterwards.

All employees must also receive adequate fire safety training (usually alongside the provision of information and instruction), when they first start work and again from time-to-time – for example, if the nature of the fire risks changes.

In simple premises, where there are no significant fire risks and limited numbers of staff, information and instruction might simply involve explaining the fire procedures, how they work and how to follow them. This would include showing staff the fire-protection arrangements – such as the designated escape routes; the location and operation of the fire-warning system and any other fire safety equipment provided, such as fire extinguishers. This can be backed up by posting suitable fire action instruction notices in prominent locations.

However, in complex premises or higher risk situations, written instructions might need to be issued to staff who have been nominated to carry out specific fire safety tasks, such as calling the fire and rescue service in the event of a fire alert.

The content and complexity of the fire safety training given to workers will depend on the nature of the risks, but it should cover issues such as the action to take upon discovering a fire or hearing the fire alarm; the escape routes to follow;

reporting to the assembly area; and the importance of following fire precautions, such as good housekeeping of materials to avoid the build-up of fuel for a fire.

Employees with a supervisory or specific role in the event of a fire – such as fire wardens or those required to attempt to fight a fire if it is safe to do so – must be given more detailed training.

The law also requires employers to establish adequate procedures to deal with emergencies and situations that pose serious and imminent danger to people at work – such as an electrical fault. All employees – and others such as contractors – must be given adequate information and training on how to follow these procedures.

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## First aid at work

Another area where employers may need to arrange for training is around the provision of first aid at work.

Under the (Health and Safety) First-Aid Regulations 1981 employers must provide adequate and appropriate first-aid equipment, facilities and people so their employees can be given immediate help if they are injured or taken ill at work.

What is ‘adequate and appropriate’ will depend on the circumstances at work and to decide this, employers must carry out an assessment of their first aid needs, including if they need trained first-aiders. This means considering factors such as the nature and extent of the hazards and risks; the number of employees; the location of the workplace; the needs of travelling, remote and lone workers; and

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the distance to any medical facilities such as hospitals.

If an employer decides first-aiders are required, they must ensure they have received suitable training from a competent trainer.

Employers have a variety of options when selecting the appropriate type and extent of training for first-aiders. This includes an emergency first aid at work (EFAW) training course – which enables a first-aider to give emergency first aid to someone who is injured or taken ill – and the more detailed first aid at work (FAW) training course, which includes EFAW and equips the first-aider to apply first aid to a range of specific injuries and illnesses. The law allows employers the flexibility to choose whatever type of first-aid training is appropriate to their circumstances – for example, specialist courses.

Employers must inform employees about the first-aid arrangements, including the location of equipment, facilities and personnel. Ways of doing this include providing the information during induction training and putting up notices and signs.

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## Hazardous substances

Employees who use, create or are liable to be exposed to hazardous substances – such as harmful chemicals, vapours, dusts, fumes and gases – can be at risk of developing serious and fatal illnesses, including asthma and cancer.

As a result, the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (COSHH) require employers to assess the

risks to workers' health from hazardous substances used, present or created at work. The employer must then prevent or adequately control employees' exposure to the substances by adopting suitable control measures, such as local exhaust ventilation to capture and remove the substance so workers do not breathe it in.

Under COSHH, employers must provide their employees with suitable information, instruction and training on:

- The nature of the hazardous substances they may be exposed to
- Any health and safety risks that might arise from using, working with or being near hazardous substances
- How to use the control measures provided, including any personal protective equipment, such as respirators and gloves
- The results of any exposure monitoring and the collective results of any health surveillance (without giving the names of individual employees)
- The importance of reporting any faults in the exposure control measures
- The emergency procedures to follow, for instance in the event of a chemical spill.

Also, the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012 (CAW) require employers to take all reasonably practicable measures to prevent or adequately control the risk of their employees or others being exposed to asbestos at work – for example, when disturbing the fabric of buildings that might contain asbestos. This includes providing all employees who could be at risk of exposure to asbestos – and those who supervise them – with adequate

information, instruction and training so they can safeguard themselves and others from being exposed to asbestos-containing materials (ACMs).

There are three main levels of information, instruction and training for employees who may need to work near, with or on asbestos or suspected ACMs:

- **Asbestos awareness training** – this is designed to ensure workers and supervisors understand how to avoid disturbing asbestos during their normal, everyday work
- **Non-licensable work with asbestos training** – this is for employees whose work requires them to knowingly disturb ACMs, but for which a formal asbestos licence is not required
- **Licensable work with asbestos training** – this is for employees carrying out work with high-risk ACMs, for which a licence is required.

Employees whose work could foreseeably disturb the fabric of a building – or other items that could contain asbestos – exposing them and others to the substance, must be given suitable ‘asbestos awareness’ information, instruction and training. The supervisors of these workers must also be provided with appropriate ‘awareness’ information, instruction and training. Asbestos awareness information, instruction and training should generally cover:

- The properties of asbestos and its health effects, including the increased risk of developing lung cancer for asbestos workers who smoke
- The types, uses and likely occurrence of asbestos and asbestos materials in

buildings and plant

- The general procedures to follow in an emergency – for example, in the event of an uncontrolled release of asbestos dust into the workplace
- How to avoid the risk of exposure to the substance – for example, by never carrying out work that could disturb the fabric of a building unless the employer has confirmed that ACMs are not present.

However, ‘awareness’ training is only designed to instruct workers to avoid disturbing ACMs and protect themselves and others from exposure. If the employer wants workers to carry out tasks that will disturb ACMs, more detailed information and training will be required.

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## Manual handling

Under the Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992, employers are required to avoid the need for employees to carry out manual handling tasks that pose a risk of injury, so far as is reasonably practicable.

However, if potentially hazardous manual handling cannot be avoided, employers must assess the risk of injury and take appropriate steps to eliminate or reduce the risk of harm to workers.

This means first trying to avoid the need for employees to manually lift, lower, carry, push or pull loads – for example, by automating or mechanising the task, such as by using conveyors, lift trucks or electrically-powered hand-pallet trucks. If this is not reasonably practicable, employers should try to reduce the risk by

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providing mechanical aids, such as hand-propelled trolleys and roll cages. They should also consider making changes to the task, the load and the working environment to reduce the risk of injury – such as making loads lighter, smaller and easier to grasp.

HSE's guidance on manual handling makes it clear that employees must be provided with specific information and training on how to protect themselves from the risk of manual handling injury as part of the employer's overall measures to control the risks from handling tasks.

However, the guidance strongly states that, although information and training are an important way of raising workers' awareness of the risks and how to reduce them, the first step should always be to design the manual handling tasks to be as safe as reasonably practicable.

HSE does not publish prescriptive guidance on what a manual handling training course should cover or how long it should last. Instead, the guidance states: "In general, courses should be suitable for the individual, tasks and environment involved, use relevant examples, relate to what workers actually do and last long enough to include all the relevant information."

HSE says the information and training should therefore be relevant to the type of work carried out and should generally cover:

- Manual handling risk factors and how manual handling injuries can occur
- Appropriate systems of work for the individual's tasks and environment
- How to use mechanical aids

- How to carry out safe manual handling, including good handling techniques
- Practical work relevant to the job so to the trainer can identify and put right anything the trainee is not doing safely
- How to report symptoms and injuries.

HSE adds that the content of any training on good handling techniques must be tailored to the actual tasks the workers carry out. It also warns research has shown that general training in lifting techniques is an ineffective way of controlling the risk of injury, and the focus should instead always be on changing the way the work is undertaken to eliminate or reduce the manual handling risks.

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### Display screen equipment

Workers using display screen equipment (DSE), such as desktop computers and laptops, can sometimes experience problems such as visual fatigue, stress and aches and pains in areas such as their hands, arms, back and shoulders. The problems can be caused by factors such as the overuse of DSE; poorly designed workstations; the organisation of the job itself; poor working environments; and inappropriate working methods, such as failing to take sufficient rest breaks.

As a result, the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 require employers to take certain steps to protect employees and others, such as self-employed people using the employer's DSE workstations, from the health and safety risks associated with DSE work. This includes assessing DSE



workstations to ensure they are suitable; ensuring workstations meet certain minimum ergonomic requirements; and ensuring employees take breaks from DSE work.

Also, employers must provide DSE users (generally defined as employees who regularly use DSE), with adequate information, instruction and training about the risks from DSE work and how to avoid them. HSE guidance states that, in general, training for DSE users should cover issues such as:

- The risks from DSE work and the controls that have been put in place to eliminate or reduce them
- How to adjust chairs and other furniture
- How to organise the workplace to avoid awkward or frequently repeated stretching movements
- The importance of good posture and frequent changes of position
- How to adjust the screen and lighting to avoid reflections and glare
- The importance of taking advantage of breaks and changes of activity
- How to report problems with workstations or symptoms of ill health
- How to complete workstation checklists, if users are involved in assessing the risks from DSE work.

DSE users must also be given information on:

- The arrangements in place for rest breaks or changes of activity
- Their right to an eye test and a basic pair of spectacles if spectacles are specifically required for DSE work.

## **Stress and mental wellbeing**

Generally speaking, work can be good for our mental wellbeing – for example, by providing us with a sense of identity and personal achievement. However, if employers fail to properly manage aspects of the design and organisation of work – such as failing to ensure employees can cope with the demands of their job – staff can suffer work-related stress. In turn, this can have a damaging effect on their mental and physical health and their performance at work.

Most workers benefit from a certain amount of pressure as it helps keep them motivated and makes them more energised. However, if the pressure exceed the individual's ability to cope the stress can become unmanageable.

Although stress is not an illness itself, it can cause workers to feel physically and psychologically unwell, such as feeling distressed and having difficulty concentrating and sleeping. If the stress is prolonged and unmanageable, it can cause or aggravate an existing mental health problem, such as anxiety and depression. Research also suggests there are strong links between stress and physical ill health, such as heart disease and back pain. Stress can also lead to other behaviours that are harmful to health, like excessive alcohol consumption.

As a result, UK employers have a legal duty to assess the risk of stress-related ill health arising from their work activities. If there is a risk, they must take steps to remove or reduce it, as far as is reasonably practicable.

## Health and Safety Training

There are a variety of reasons why someone may suffer work-related stress but common causes include people being unable to cope with the amount or type of work they are asked to do, poor relationships at work and workers not receiving sufficient support from managers and colleagues. However, HSE says work-related stress can be tackled and managed by addressing key aspects of work design. This means, for example, ensuring workloads are appropriate and there is adequate support for employees from their managers.

HSE says it is important employers take a preventive approach to approach to tackling stress at an organisational level. In essence, this means focusing on preventing and managing the root causes of work-related stress, rather than trying to deal with problems after they occur and staff are under harmful pressure.

HSE – and other advice organisations like Acas, Business in the Community (BITC), the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), the Mental Health at Work website and Mind – provide advice on improving aspects of the work design and culture to prevent or reduce the risk of harmful stress at work. These include measures such as ensuring sufficient resources (such as time and equipment) are available for staff to do their jobs; allowing employees some control over the pace of their work; designing jobs to provide stimulation and opportunities for workers to use their skills to keep them motivated and interested in their work; and promoting positive behaviours at work to avoid

conflict and ensure fairness.

In terms of providing employees and managers with information and training to reduce the risk of stress-related ill health, some tips from HSE include:

- Provide training to help staff prioritise their workload, and information on how they can seek help if they have conflicting priorities at work
- Ensure staff receive sufficient training to undertake the core functions of their job
- Regularly check the training given to ensure employees are competent and comfortable in undertaking the core functions of their job
- Encourage employees to develop their skills, ask them how they would like to use their skills and find out if they believe they can use their skills to good effect – for example, by drawing up personal development plans that allow staff to identify the skills they would like to develop and any relevant training opportunities they would like to pursue, if the employer agrees
- Provide information on the support available for those experiencing stress or poor mental health, such as the employee assistance programme, the occupational health team and external organisations
- If there is a risk of violence, aggression and verbal abuse – for example, from customers – provide training to help employees deal with and diffuse difficult situations
- Provide all new members of staff with a thorough induction to the organisation and its policies and procedure,

including details of where to get support or who to speak to about work-related stress

- If there are organisational changes that could impact on the way employees carry out their role, ensure staff are given training to support and deal with any changes to their jobs.

Increasingly, more employers are recognising the importance and benefits of taking a positive and proactive approach to supporting mental health at work – both for the health of individuals and the overall performance of the business. This approach generally includes tackling the causes of mental ill health at work; creating a culture that promotes positive mental health; and helping workers to better manage mental health problems, regardless of whether they appear as a result of experiences in their work or personal lives or just develop with no obvious cause.

The employer advice body BITC and Public Health England (PHE) state in their free [Mental Health for Employers Toolkit](#) that looking after mental health at work can reap benefits for a business because staff who have positive mental health are more productive. [Acas](#), meanwhile, says creating an environment where staff feel able to talk openly about mental health can prevent problems building up – for example, encouraging people to seek support at an early stage can avoid the need for them to take time off.

Detailed guidance on how to improve and support the mental health of workers is available from organisations like BITC, CIPD, IOSH, Mind and the Mental Health

at Work website. For instance, the 2021 [What If Your Job Was Job for You?](#) report from BITC (produced with Affinity Health at Work and CIPD), reminds employers that rather than simply dealing with the symptoms of work-related mental ill health after they arise, they should focus on preventing mental ill health by creating work that is good for mental wellbeing and ensuring the organisational culture drives positive mental health outcomes.

However, some general tips on the role that information and training can play, both in preventing work-related mental ill health and supporting staff who experience mental health problems, taken from the [BITC/PHE Mental Health for Employers Toolkit](#), include:

- Training line managers so they are equipped with skills in effective leadership, stress risk management, mental health awareness, the management of sickness absence and how to support staff with mental health problems. The BITC/PHE toolkit says managers will often be the first person to notice when an employee is experiencing difficulties; can intervene at an early stage to allow adjustments to be made to enable the individual to continue to work; and good quality people management, particularly by line managers, is a core driver of employee engagement, wellbeing and mental health
- Ensuring managers are conscious of the signs of poor mental health; understand the support available to those who are experiencing difficulties; ‘check in’ with individuals

## Health and Safety Training

at appropriate times; and encourage safe disclosure if an employee is experiencing poor mental health

- Ensuring managers are trained and confident in how to handle sensitive conversations around mental health
- Ensuring all new employees are made aware of the organisation's mental health policies and procedures by making positive references to them during their induction
- Ensuring everyone at work is aware of who they can talk to about their own mental health
- Equipping all employees – including management and senior staff – with the knowledge to spot the signs that either they themselves or someone they know may be struggling, and to signpost them towards appropriate sources of support.

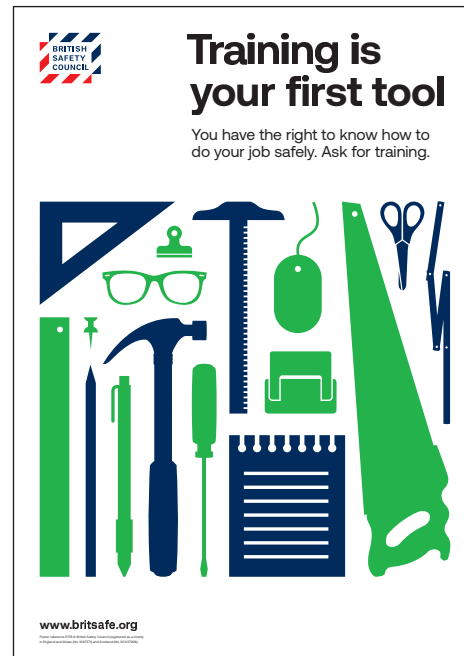
### Finally...

Control measures – including safe systems of work, physical safeguards and personal protective equipment – play a vital role in preventing accidents and cases of ill health. However, these measures will be ineffective if employees are not provided with suitable information and training on how to work without posing a risk to the health and safety of themselves and others.

By providing effective information and training, employers can ensure workers have the right skills and knowledge to undertake their tasks in a safe and healthy fashion; therefore protecting themselves and others.

### Get the poster:

Remind workers to always follow their health and safety training.



**British Safety Council members with the Tools and Templates membership module can download these posters from their online account. Log in at:**  
[www.britsafe.org](http://www.britsafe.org)  
(UK & international)  
[www.britsafe.in](http://www.britsafe.in) (India)

# Recommended reading

**HSE guidance on minimising the risk from coronavirus**

[hse.gov.uk](https://www.hse.gov.uk)

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**Health and safety made simple/toolbox**

[hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety](https://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety)

[hse.gov.uk/toolbox](https://www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox)

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**Managing for health and safety/managing risks**

[hse.gov.uk/managing](https://www.hse.gov.uk/managing)

[hse.gov.uk/risk/index.htm](https://www.hse.gov.uk/risk/index.htm)

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**Health and safety training: a brief guide**

[hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg345.htm](https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg345.htm)

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**Health and safety law. What you need to know poster, leaflet and pocket card**

[hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/lawposter.htm](https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/lawposter.htm)

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**Workers' health and safety (webpages)**

[hse.gov.uk/workers/index.htm](https://www.hse.gov.uk/workers/index.htm)

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**Your health, your safety. A brief guide for workers**

[hse.gov.uk/workers/hse27.htm](https://www.hse.gov.uk/workers/hse27.htm)

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**Working in Great Britain from overseas**

[hse.gov.uk/migrantworkers](https://www.hse.gov.uk/migrantworkers)

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**Worker involvement (HSE webpages)**

[hse.gov.uk/involvement/index.htm](https://www.hse.gov.uk/involvement/index.htm)

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**Consulting employees on health and safety. A brief guide to the law**

[hse.gov.uk/involvement/publications.htm](https://www.hse.gov.uk/involvement/publications.htm)

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**Involving your workforce in health and safety: guidance for all workplaces**

[hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/hsg263.htm](https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/hsg263.htm)

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**Fire safety in the workplace (government guidance)**

[bit.ly/3xDXDHj](https://bit.ly/3xDXDHj)

[bit.ly/2SqjHX9](https://bit.ly/2SqjHX9)

[bit.ly/3dtMgKH](https://bit.ly/3dtMgKH)

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**Young people at work (HSE webpages)**

[hse.gov.uk/youngpeople](https://www.hse.gov.uk/youngpeople)

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**Manual handling at work: A brief guide**

[hse.gov.uk/msd/information.htm](https://www.hse.gov.uk/msd/information.htm)

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**Noise at work: A brief guide to controlling the risks**

[hse.gov.uk/noise/publications.htm](https://www.hse.gov.uk/noise/publications.htm)

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**Rider-operated lift trucks. ACOP and guidance**

[hse.gov.uk/pubns/priced/l117.pdf](https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/priced/l117.pdf)

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**Working with substances hazardous to health**

[hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg136.pdf](https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg136.pdf)

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**Working with display screen equipment**

[hse.gov.uk/msd/dse/index.htm](https://www.hse.gov.uk/msd/dse/index.htm)

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**First aid at work. Your questions answered**

[hse.gov.uk/firstaid](https://www.hse.gov.uk/firstaid)

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**Occupational disease: HSE microsite**

[bit.ly/2KCLWNS](https://bit.ly/2KCLWNS)

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**Asbestos information and guidance**

[hse.gov.uk/asbestos/information.htm](https://www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos/information.htm)

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**Stress and mental health at work HSE webpages**

[hse.gov.uk/stress](https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress)

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**Acas guidance on topics such as supporting mental health at work and flexible working**

[acas.org.uk](https://www.acas.org.uk)

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**BITC/Public Health England toolkits on topics such as mental health, MSDs, physical activity, healthier eating, and drugs, alcohol and tobacco**

[bitc.org.uk](https://www.bitc.org.uk)

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**CIPD guidance on topics such as mental health**

[cipd.co.uk](https://www.cipd.co.uk)

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**IOSH guidance on topics such as mental health**

[iosh.com](https://www.iosh.com)

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**Mental Health at Work Commitment**

[mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/commitment](https://www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/commitment)

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**People managers' guide to mental health**

[bit.ly/2NBleEj](https://bit.ly/2NBleEj)

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# Further help

## Acas

Independent organisation that provides advice to employers on health and business issues such as supporting good employee mental health.

[acas.org.uk](https://www.acas.org.uk)

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## Being Well Together

Programme from the British Safety Council that provides employers with a wide range of services and tools to enable them to support worker health and wellbeing. Supporters have a range of benefits, such as support for their wellbeing programme and wellbeing training and guides for employers and employees.

[www.beingwelltogether.org](https://www.beingwelltogether.org)

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## BOHS (British Occupational Hygiene Society)

Professional body for occupational hygienists, who specialise in preventing work-related ill health caused by exposure to hazardous substances and agents. Website features free guidance.

[bohs.org](https://www.bohs.org)

[www.breathefreely.org.uk](https://www.breathefreely.org.uk)

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## British Safety Council

Offers a wide range of training courses and qualifications to help employers and workers manage health, safety and environmental risks at work. The courses and qualifications also encourage managers and staff to play their part in keeping the workplace safe, healthy and sustainable. They are available via e-learning, distance learning and classroom learning.

[www.britsafe.org](https://www.britsafe.org)

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## Business in the Community (BITC)

Charity that provides free guidance for employers on improving the health and wellbeing of their workers.

[bitc.org.uk](https://www.bitc.org.uk)

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## CIPD

Professional UK body for people development professionals. Offers free guidance on subjects such as supporting mental health at work.

[cipd.co.uk](https://www.cipd.co.uk)

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## Health and Safety Executive (HSE)

UK health and safety regulator. Offers free advice.

[hse.gov.uk](https://www.hse.gov.uk)

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## Healthy Working Lives (Scotland)

Free health and safety advice service for Scottish employers of all sizes.

[healthyworkinglives.com](https://www.healthyworkinglives.com)

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## Healthy Working Wales

Free health and safety advice service for employers and employees in Wales. Website provides guidance to help employers improve the health, safety and welfare of their staff.

[www.healthyworkingwales.wales.nhs.uk/home](https://www.healthyworkingwales.wales.nhs.uk/home)

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## IOSH

Chartered body and membership organisation for safety and health professionals. Provides a free online guidance on managing health and safety.

[iosh.com](https://www.iosh.com)

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## Mates in Mind

A sister charity of the British Safety Council that helps UK employers to support the mental health of their workers. It offers training designed to get everyone thinking and talking about mental health and to give people the skills to support the mental wellbeing of their colleagues.

[www.matesinmind.org](https://www.matesinmind.org)

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## Mental Health at Work

Website that brings together a variety of guidance on mental health at work from key UK organisations.

[mentalhealthatwork.org.uk](https://www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk)

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## Mind

Charity that provides a range of information and support for those living with a mental health problem or supporting someone who is. Also offers guidance for employees on managing personal stress and for employers on how to create mentally healthy workplaces.

[mind.org.uk](https://www.mind.org.uk)

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[www.britsafe.org/AllTraining](http://www.britsafe.org/AllTraining)

We offer training and qualifications in health, safety and environmental management, including NEBOSH and IOSH.

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