

1. INTRODUCTION

Health surveillance is the application of systematic, regular and appropriate procedures to identify early signs of work related ill health in employees who are exposed to certain health risks. It also allows the identification of susceptible employees who may have an underlying health condition and to whom we may owe an extra duty of care.

2. WHY CARRY OUT HEALTH SURVEILLANCE?

Health surveillance can be carried out to:

- provide information to detect harmful health effects at an early stage, thereby protecting employees and confirming whether they are still fit to do their jobs
- check control measures are adequate by giving feedback on risk assessment, suggesting where further action might be needed
- provide data, by means of health records and anonymised trend records that can be used to review risk assessments and control measures
- provide an opportunity to train and instruct employees further in safe and healthy working practices
- give employees the chance to raise any concerns about the effect of their work on their health

3. WHEN IS HEALTH SURVEILLANCE APPROPRIATE?

Health surveillance is required if you answer 'yes' to all or any of the following:

- Is the work known to potentially damage health in some particular way?
- Are there valid ways to detect the disease condition? Health surveillance is only worthwhile where it can reliably show that damage to health is starting to happen or becoming likely. A technique is only useful if it provides accurate results and is safe and practicable.
- It is reasonably likely that damage to health may occur under the particular conditions at work?

For example, these criteria would be met in the following circumstances:

- high noise levels are known to cause hearing loss
- a valid technique – hearing tests – can detect the effect of noise on the hearing of individuals who work in noisy conditions
- hearing tests will benefit employees by identifying those at risk so that measures can be taken to protect them and improve working conditions

Other tips for assessing whether health surveillance might be appropriate include:

- known previous cases of work related ill health in the workplace
- reliance on PPE as an exposure control measure
- evidence of ill health in the jobs found in the scaffolding industry

In construction there is a legal requirement for health surveillance where employees are exposed to:

- hazardous substances such as chemicals, solvents, fumes, dusts, gases, vapours, aerosols and biological agents (COSHH), with potential respiratory and skin sensitiser hazards
- asbestos, lead (when required, medical surveillance to be carried out by HSE appointed doctor), work in compressed air (specific related regulations);
- noise (control of noise at work regulations 2005), hand arm vibration health (Control of Vibration at Work Regulations 2005).

Hazardous Activities / Procedures Not Requiring Health Surveillance

Many activities may be carried out by employees, which although hazardous, do not require formal health surveillance or where the exposures are a minimal risk to the employee. Employers must ensure that under these circumstance all employees are provided with information, instruction and training on how to protect their health from these hazards via the induction and risk assessment process.

Health Assessment Matrix¹

The purpose of the health assessment matrix below is a guide to the relationship between job roles within the scaffolding industry, construction, allied industries and the type of health assessment that may be required subject to the risk assessment process. The matrix can be used by both employers and occupational health providers as a means of identifying the health assessments required for a particular job role. The matrix sets out the health checks and fitness levels required for each job role found within the scaffolding industry.

It is important that employers understand the health risks and procedures to prevent ill health, and the different categories of medical checks and what is mandatory, best practice or desirable; so that informed choices can be made of the type of occupational health service to purchase.

Health Assessment Matrix	A	B	C	D1	D2	D3	D4	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R
	Pre-Placement Questionnaire	Pre-Placement Health Assessment/Medical	Safety Critical Workers – Fitness For Task Assessments	Statutory Medicals (Appointed Doctor)				Musculoskeletal Questionnaire/Assessment	Skin Health Check	Respiratory Health Check	Audiometry Health Check	Vibration Health Check	Blood Pressure	Urinalysis	Visual Acuity	Mid Range Acuity (DSE users)	Colour Vision	Biological Monitoring	Workplace Stress / Mental Health Assessment	Drug and Alcohol Screening (Company Policy)	General Health/Lifestyle
SECTION 1: JOB ROLE/TASK																					
Administrator	Green															Red			Green	Green	Green
Asbestos Licensed Worker	Red	Red	C	Red					Yellow	Red		Yellow									Green
LGV/HGV Driver	Yellow	Yellow	C						Green			Green									Green
Scaffolder	Yellow	Yellow	C						Yellow			Yellow									Green

¹ Extract from Industry Standards for Workplace Health in UK Construction (latest edition)



Where health surveillance is carried out, which includes a valid technique, the records must also contain the following information:

8. Date of health surveillance
9. Name of person carrying out health surveillance
10. Conclusions of health surveillance including decisions for example fitness/unfitness for work, and any work restrictions but not including any confidential clinical data.

These Health records should be available for inspection by Inspectors (ie. HSE, ORR, Environmental Health Officers).

5. CONCLUSION

Health surveillance is only appropriate and worthwhile if you can act on the results. If employees are suffering from an adverse health effect e.g. respiratory diseases or dermatitis then you must prevent further exposure to the substance. This may be by a change of process or material, by relocating the worker or by the provision of respiratory protective equipment or personal protective equipment. RPE and PPE are only suitable where exposure to the substance is a small part of the work e.g. for short periods of time.

Anonymised trend results can be used to review the risk assessment. When assessing the need for health surveillance, remember:

- health surveillance is not a substitute for preventing or controlling exposure, rather it is a way of seeking to protect employees' health;
- using the right technique, in the right way, at the right time is critical. Getting it wrong can be expensive. Also remember, some tests are themselves not free from risk (e.g. X-rays) and the results, if inaccurate or badly explained, could add additional stress to employees;
- whichever technique is used, you should carry out health surveillance systematically and regularly; and
- simply carrying out health surveillance procedures is not enough; it is essential you act on the results.

Know what you need before you approach the Occupational Health Service Provider.

Check the competence of the provider of the Health surveillance.

Treat it as any other service and obtain 3 quotes from different practitioners.

For further advice see:

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/health-surveillance/>

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/health-surveillance/assets/documents/health-surveillance-cycle.pdf>

Whilst every effort has been made to provide reliable and accurate information, we would welcome any corrections to information provided by the Writer which may not be entirely accurate, therefore and for this reason, the NASC or indeed the Writer, cannot accept responsibility for any misinformation posted.



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