



Occupational Safety & Health Newsletter



NHSF, Workplace Health & Wellbeing Unit, HR, Issue 22

COVID-19 and Pregnancy Risk Assessment

The Workplace Health and Wellbeing Unit has provided guidance for pregnant healthcare workers titled [Guidance on Fitness for Work of Healthcare Workers in the Higher Risk Categories, including Pregnant Healthcare Workers](#). This guidance states that pregnant healthcare workers may fall into two risk categories, with specific pathways to provide for the safety of the healthcare workers and their unborn child.



The COVID-19 vaccine is one way to help protect you as a healthcare worker, however if you have any concerns you can seek further advice from your obstetrician or GP about getting the COVID-19 vaccine. The [pregnancy risk assessment](#) has been revised to take account of this guidance and potential exposure to biological agents, including COVID-19. Please ensure you discuss this risk assessment process with your line manager.

COVID-19 Occupational Safety and Health Audit Tool



As part of the work of the COVID-19 Integrated National Operations Hub (INOH), the National Health and Safety Function (NHSF) developed an online self-assessment audit tool specifically for COVID-19. This audit tool was reviewed by our colleagues in the National Antimicrobial Resistance and Infection Control Department.

The purpose of this audit tool was to assist management to determine their level of compliance with the [Government's Work Safely Protocol](#). The elements of the audit tool included: roles, documentation, training, Personal Protective Equipment, risk assessment and contractors safety (construction and non-construction). Upon completion, a quality improvement plan (QIP) was automatically generated, which outlined performance for each criterion, identified inadequacies and provided improvement recommendations.

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This audit tool, launched by the Office of the Chief Operations Officer in January 2021, required completion at site/service level by senior management (e.g. a COVID-19 Response Manager, or the manager who is responsible for coordinating the COVID-19 response).

There was a substantial response, with returns received from 660 HSE sites and services within the divisions of Acute Hospitals, Community Health Organisations and Corporate Services. The NHSF plan to commence a validation process in April 2021.

The learnings of the self-assessment tool will be made available with further supports developed by the NHSF as appropriate. The NHSF would like to thank all those who took part in this valuable safety initiative.

HSA 2020 Biological Agents Code of Practice

The Health and Safety Authority has published a Code of Practice for the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Biological Agents) Regulations 2013 and 2020.

This revised code of practice requires that viruses are listed according to Order, Family and Genus and the addition of new biological agents such as *Clostridium difficile*, MERS and the SARS-CoV-2 viruses. Taking account of the information in the Code of Practice, managers should review their risk assessments to ensure that they are relevant and provide adequate employee protection. Go to our [Biological Agents](#) webpage for guidance on completing your Biological Risk Assessment.



The inclusion of SARS-COV-2 (COVID-19) in the Code of Practice introduces a reporting requirement under Regulation 12 of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Biological Agents) Regulations 2013, see below.

COVID-19 Incident Reporting

As per *HSA Code of Practice* and the *HSE HR Memo re Covid-19 Revised Incident Reporting Requirements*, when an employer becomes aware of a confirmed case of COVID-19 in an employee (e.g. informed by a medical practitioner, public health or other health professional) caused by carrying out work with the Coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), this should be reported on NIMS and to the Health and Safety Authority.

How do I determine if a case of COVID-19 is work-related?

There are two scenarios where occupational exposure to biological agents can occur:

1. **Occupational exposure** to SARS-CoV-2 can result from carrying out work activities that involve a intention to work with the virus, e.g. propagating the virus in a research laboratory.
2. **Occupational exposure** can also occur incidentally from specific work activities involving direct exposure to the virus, e.g. working directly with a COVID-19 patient, handling SARS-CoV-2 infected waste, conducting COVID-19 testing or carrying out diagnostic testing for COVID-19 in a laboratory.

In establishing if an employee was infected with COVID-19 as a result of their work activities, their manager must make a reasonable determination of the relevant circumstances. For reporting of incidents on NIMS/HSA please check local arrangements in place.

Reporting an Incident on NIMS: Complete the [HCW COVID-19 Acquired NIRF Form](#)

Reporting an Incident to the HSA : Relevant incidents are reported to the HSA using this [form](#) and submit by email to the HSA Workplace Contact Unit at: wcu@hsa.ie

In the case of an employee death, where it has been established that the death was due to the employee's work with the Coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), the manager must notify this death to the Health and Safety Authority.

Safety Representative Networking Sessions

Over the past number of months, the NHSF have successfully facilitated Safety Representative networking sessions via an online platform.

The aim of these workshops is to; improve networking for our safety representatives, enhance their knowledge and to support them in fulfilling their role. In turn, these sessions enable Safety Representatives to support their work colleagues and continue to improve and implement the HSE's health and safety management programme.

In 2020, a total of 67 Health and Safety Representatives participated in these online sessions, feedback was very positive.

'...It enhanced my knowledge of my role and I was made aware of new material developed such as the Safety Rep Inspection checklist'

'...learned about COVID-19 guidance and information on the Lead worker Rep in relation to COVID -19 also

'...was nice to put faces to the names even though it was through a screen. Very informative and useful information given

The NHSF aim to continue these sessions throughout 2021. Safety Representatives who are interested in attending can register by emailing Rosemary at rosemaryb.cullen@hse.ie

Safety, Support and Advice for Home Working

Home working and staying healthy

Image Ref: Chartered Institute of Ergonomics and Human Factors

Setting up your workspace

Look **STRAIGHT AHEAD**, monitor at eye level or just below and an arm's length away. If using multiple monitors, angle them inwards to reduce neck rotation.

Give your **EYES** a break. Every 20 minutes, look 20 feet away for 20 seconds. 20-20-20.

ELBOWS and **FOREARMS** level with the desk surface, shoulders are down and relaxed. Adjust chair height or prop yourself up with additional cushions.

FEET planted on the floor. A footrest is ideal; alternatively, use a box.



Keyboard and mouse positioned close to the edge of the desk to avoid unnecessary stretching. Don't shrug **SHOULDERS** when typing and mousing; lower the work surface or adjust your chair height to avoid this.

Sit **BACK** taking full backrest support. Adjustable chairs are ideal. For more lumbar support, place a cushion or rolled up towel behind you.

Keep **THIGHS** parallel to the floor, knees slightly lower than the hips.

Regular **MOVEMENT** is key. Get up from your chair 2-3 times an hour for 30-60 seconds or 5-10 minutes every hour. Add dynamic stretches to daily routines as well as walking.

Working from home continues for many HSE staff, to support you to work from home safely the National Health & Safety Function has developed an informative [Video Presentation](#). It provides practical safety tips for you and your manager to consider such as;

- How to improve your workstation set-up
- Work posture and
- Ergonomic tips

Further guidance documents are available to support managers and employees to work safely while working from home:

- [Working from home during COVID-19 – Workstation Setup](#)
- [COVID-19 Home Working](#)
- [Home Working Risk Assessment Form](#)
- [Working from home webpage](#)



What's New



New Health and Safety Programmes on hseland.ie Cúram le Eolas

Health and Safety Risk Assessment Training:

The webinar aims to provide managers with the knowledge and skills to assess occupational safety and health (OSH) risks. This course is statutory/mandatory for all line, service and department managers who have responsibility for undertaking workplace occupational safety and health risk assessments. Available on

hseland.ie



Biological Agents Hazards Training:

This course is to be undertaken by line, service and department managers in healthcare. This module presents an overview of the types and classes of biological agents that may be encountered in healthcare and introduces the biological agents risk assessment. Available on hseland.ie



New H&S documentation for Testing and Vaccination Centres

To assist managers of COVID-19 Testing and Vaccinations Centres meet their health and safety requirements, the NHSF have developed the following:

The [COVID-19 Test Centre Checklist](#) details over 100 items to be considered from external areas to PPE, social distancing to waste management. On completion of this checklist, gaps in your safety management system will be identified and remedial actions should be documented on the appropriate risk assessment forms for implementation.

The [COVID-19 Vaccination Centre Prompt Sheet](#) details 58 prompts relevant to hazard areas which should be considered when assessing and controlling the hazards associated within the Vaccination Centres. All control measures must then be documented on the appropriate risk assessment form.

A new guideline document on the [Occupational Safety and Health requirements for COVID-19 Vaccination Centres](#) has also been released to support Managers in the development and maintenance of their Safety Management System, including the requisite supporting documentation.

COVID-19 Healthcare Worker Helpline



This helpline provides staff and managers with the latest information and advice relating to health and safety, occupational health and employee assistance queries during COVID-19.

Since March 2020, this dedicated COVID-19 helpline has provided support to over 28,790 Health Care Workers. Callsave:

1850 420 420 Mon-Friday: 9am - 5pm