

Stay safe: vibration at work

By safely disposing of your liquid waste, you are helping to protect the natural environment. But it's important to protect yourself and others too.

Occupational vibration can cause long-term damage to the body – whether that's to joints, muscles, circulation or nerves. Prolonged exposure can lead to disability and in severe cases amputation.

There are two types of conditions resulting from vibration, namely hand-arm vibration syndrome from using tools and equipment and whole-body vibration syndrome from driving on uneven surfaces. Both conditions can cause considerable pain and damage to health.

Employers have a duty under The Control of Vibration Work Regulations 2005 to protect employees from high levels of vibration by carrying out a number of measures including risk assessments, control procedures, health surveillance and employee training.

Hand-arm vibration syndrome (HAVS)

HAVS is caused by regular exposure to high levels of vibration from hand held tools and equipment.

HAVS is a painful and debilitating condition which can lead to long-term damage to nerves, blood vessels, muscles and joints of the hands and arms. In some cases it can result in disability or in more extreme cases, amputation.

Symptoms of HAVS include tingling and numbness in the fingers, reduced grip strength, poor sense of touch, diminished blood circulation and painful attacks of fingers turning white when exposed to cold and/or vibration.

HAVS is irreversible so prevention is vital to protect employees from developing the disease.



Ways to reduce hand-arm vibration:

- Purchase tools and machinery with low vibration levels
- Isolate machines and equipment that cause hand tingling or numbness after a few minutes use and reduce exposure
- Investigate whether the work can be carried out in a different way to reduce the grip or pressure needed
- Maintain machines and equipment regularly
- Limit exposure to vibration, rotate tasks and ensure adequate breaks
- Check that people are using the right tools and are trained how to use them
- Provide the correct personal protective equipment.

Whole-body vibration (WBV)

WBV is caused by the jarring and jolting effect of driving vehicles or machinery on poorly maintained roads, rough or uneven surfaces. Prolonged exposure can result in considerable lower back pain as well as aches and pains in the arm, shoulder, or the neck. (Note that back pain can also be caused by other factors and WBV may not necessarily be the root cause of the problem).

Ways to reduce whole-body vibration:

- Choose an appropriate vehicle or machine to deal with the task and conditions
- Ensure site access routes are free of potholes and debris
- Train employees on how to adjust suspension seats and drive at appropriate speeds for particular ground conditions
- Ensure vehicle suspension systems are well maintained
- Limit the amount of time workers are exposed to WBV
- Check tyre pressures and suspension seats regularly.

It is important to seek medical advice if you experience any symptoms associated with HAVS or WBV. Early diagnosis can result in effective action being taken to prevent further damage.

