



## **Hand-arm vibration**

Employee briefing

### **Risks**

Workers regularly using vibratory tools such as chainsaws, strimmers, hedge cutters, brush cutters, mowers, wacker plates, hammer action tools, grinders or who hold workpieces which vibrate while being processed by powered machinery, such as pedestal grinders are at risk of hand arm vibration injuries.

### **Symptoms**

Identifying signs and symptoms at an early stage is important.

The symptoms include any combination of:

- tingling and numbness in the fingers
- not being able to feel things properly
- loss of strength in the hands
- fingers going white (blanching) and becoming red and painful on recovery (particularly in the cold and wet, probably only in the tips of the fingers first)



For some people, symptoms may appear after only a few months of exposure, but for others they may take a few years. They are likely to get worse with continued exposure to vibration and may become permanent.

The effects of symptoms on people include:

- pain, distress and sleep disturbance;
- inability to do fine work, e.g. picking up small items or fastening buttons;
- reduced ability to work in cold or damp conditions such as outdoor work which would trigger painful finger blanching attacks;
- reduced grip strength, which might affect the ability to do work safely.

These effects can severely limit the jobs an affected person is able to do, as well as many family and social activities. People with HAVS have reported not being able to do things they enjoy anymore, such as swimming, angling, playing darts, DIY, being outside in cold weather.

### **What can be done to reduce the risks**

The risk of developing HAVS depends on:

- the level of vibration given off by the tools;

- length of time using the tools;
- the way the tools are used; and
- how cold it is.

Some of the risks posed by hand-arm vibration can be reduced by:

- Purchasing low-vibration tools – e.g. battery operated, hydrostatic powered barrows.
- Using the right tool for each job (to do the job more quickly and expose you to less hand-arm vibration).
- Checking tools before using them to make sure they have been properly maintained and repaired to avoid increased vibration caused by faults or general wear.
- Making sure cutting tools are kept sharp so that they remain efficient.
- Reducing the amount of time, you use a tool in one go, by doing other jobs in between. Carrying out daily exposure monitoring can assist with this.
- Avoiding gripping or forcing a tool or workpiece more than you have to.
- Storing tools so that they do not have very cold handles when next used.
- Encouraging good blood circulation by keeping warm and dry. When necessary, wear gloves, a hat, waterproofs, and use heat pads if available;
- Giving up or cutting down on smoking because smoking reduces blood flow;
- Massaging and exercising your fingers during work breaks;
- Reporting any concerns about your health or the equipment you use to your manager.

Employees exposing themselves to significant levels of vibration during out of work activities must recognise that this will have a cumulative effect on top of any workplace exposure.

### **Final Do's and Don'ts**

**Don't** use equipment unless you understand the vibration levels.

**Do** complete the Hand-Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVS) course on Leap into Learning



**Do** carry out periodic monitoring of daily exposures and reduce your exposure to vibration. Ask your manager if you are not sure how to do this.

**Do** attend health surveillance regularly, usually every 12 months. Remind your manager if you have not been seen in the last 12 months.

**Do** report any symptoms of HAVS to your line manager.