

Vibration

Did you know?

Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVS) is serious and disabling, and nearly two million people are at risk.

Around 36,000 people suffer from advanced forms of the illness (vibration white finger or HAVS) caused through the use of powered hand-held tools.

Each year hundreds of cases are assessed for benefits by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

What are the hazards and risks with vibration?

Hand-arm vibration (HAV) is a type of vibration that is transmitted to an individual's hands and arms when using hand-held or hand-guided power tools and machines. Regular and frequent exposure to vibration can lead to HAVS and carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS). In construction you are most at risk from these conditions if your work includes using, for example:

- *Concrete breakers*
- *Pokers and compactors*
- *Sanders*
- *Grinders and disc cutters*
- *Hammer drills*
- *Scabblers and needle guns*

When am I most at risk?

If you regularly use any of these hand-held power tools the risk increases when:

- *You use the equipment for a long time*
- *You get cold or wet when using the equipment*
- *You have to grip the tools tightly*
- *It is awkward to use the tools*

What should my employer be doing?

Your employer must assess and identify ways to get rid of or reduce your exposure to vibration to protect you and your health, and then make sure that:

- *Control measures to reduce vibration are properly applied*
- *You are provided with relevant information and training on vibration and its risks to your health*

Health surveillance (regular health checks) are carried out if necessary

A good way of controlling exposure to vibration is to look for new or alternative work methods that eliminate or reduce exposure to vibration. **Some other control measures can include:**

- *Making sure new tools have vibration controls built in*
- *Recommending regular breaks or task rotation where possible*
- *Providing heating or suitable clothing and gloves*
- *Carrying out regular maintenance on tools*

What health checks should I have?

Carrying out health checks, or surveillance, is important in detecting early signs of damage. For HAVS you can be given a questionnaire to fill in, asking simple questions; for example, if you use vibrating equipment and if you have had any symptoms. If your answers show that you may have symptoms then you may need to have a HAVS assessment. In the assessment you will be asked more detailed questions and your hands and arms will be examined. It may be that you are asked to do some exercises to measure your grip strength and manual dexterity.

What can I do to reduce the risk from vibration?

- *Keep warm and wear gloves in cold weather*
- *Do not force the tool – the more you grip, the greater the vibration*
- *Ensure that tools are regularly maintained and kept sharp*
- *Try to take breaks away from using power tools. For example, could you change to another task for a while?*

What are the symptoms and what do I need to do?

Being able to identify any signs of HAVS at an early stage is important because making early adjustments can prevent the condition from getting any worse.

Sometimes symptoms appear after only a few months of exposure or it may take a few years. But the symptoms are likely to get worse with continued exposure to vibration and may become permanent. HAVS can be painful, cause distress and be disabling. It can affect your ability to work as well as social activities, like playing sport. In the worst cases, it can lead to amputation.

What are the warning signs?

- *Have you ever suffered from your fingers going white and numb when exposed to cold?*
- *Do you suffer from tingling in your hands?*
- *Are you suffering from loss of grip strength in your hands and do you have pain in your wrist and arm?*
- *Do you feel that the sensation of touch in any of your fingers isn't as good as it used to be?*
- *Is there a reduction in how well you can carry out fine tasks because your fingers don't work as well as they used to?*

If you have answered yes to one or more of these questions then you need to speak to your manager, the occupational health nurse or your GP as soon as possible.

For general advice you can contact CBH on 0845 873 7726

Useful links

HSE website at: www.hse.gov.uk/vibration/

CBH website at: www.cbhscheme.com

Fit for Work website at: fitforwork.org