

WHAT IS HAVS / VWF?

Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVS) and Vibration White Finger (VWF) are potentially serious conditions affecting the hands and fingers. Damage may be caused to blood vessels, nerves, muscles & joints through the use of vibratory tools.

A variety of symptoms & problems may result e.g.:

- * Blanching of fingers
- * Numbness / tingling
- * Reduced grip strength
- * Reduced dexterity
- * Reduced sensitivity to touch and temperature
- * Pain & stiffness in the hands and fingers

WHO IS AT RISK?

Anyone who is exposed to hand transmitted vibration at work may be at risk. This results from regular use of vibratory tools. Many different types of tools can put users at risk. These include:

- * Road drills
- * Concrete breakers
- * Hand-held grinders
- * Power hammers and chisels
- * Power lawnmowers
- * Strimmers etc

In a small number of cases there may be extreme damage with dark discolouration of the skin and even gangrene. The risk of suffering from HAVS depends on a number of factors such as the level of vibration & the time equipment is used for.

HOW COMMON IS HAVS?

The Medical Research Council estimates that about 4.9 million workers are exposed to HAVS in the UK. The HSE believes that around 300,000 people may be at risk from moderate to severe finger blanching.

HOW CAN THE RISK BE REDUCED?

There are a number of ways to minimise the risk:

- * Well designed tools
- * Engineering controls to minimise vibration
- * Job rotation / limiting time spent using vibratory tools
- * Training in the proper use of tools

Medical surveillance is essential to identify early signs of HAVS / VWF. Employees should be encouraged to look after their health. Advice may include giving up smoking, exercising hands and fingers and keeping warm. Early symptoms must be reported.



WHAT ARE THE LEGAL OBLIGATIONS OF THE EMPLOYER?

Vibration White Finger is a prescribed disease under the Industrial Diseases Regulations (1985) and Reporting of Injuries, Diseases & Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (1995). Employers are required to protect their staff from Vibration White Finger and Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome by European directives and UK occupational health laws.

A key part of the requirement is providing occupational health surveillance. Article 8 of the Common Position (EC) no. 26/2001, adopted 25/06/01 states that "workers exposed to mechanical vibration...shall be entitled to appropriate health surveillance."

EOH SURVEILLANCE PROGRAMME

A surveillance programme will include regular follow-up examinations so as to ensure that early symptoms & signs are detected. In this way long-term damage may be minimised or avoided altogether.

Our assessment of Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome will include:

OCCUPATIONAL QUESTIONNAIRE

A comprehensive medical and occupational history. This includes details of current and previous exposure to vibration in both employment and hobbies.

MEDICAL EXAMINATION

Careful examination to assess signs of damage to the nerves, blood supply or other structures in the hands and fingers. Examination findings will then be classified according to the Stockholm Workshop Scale.

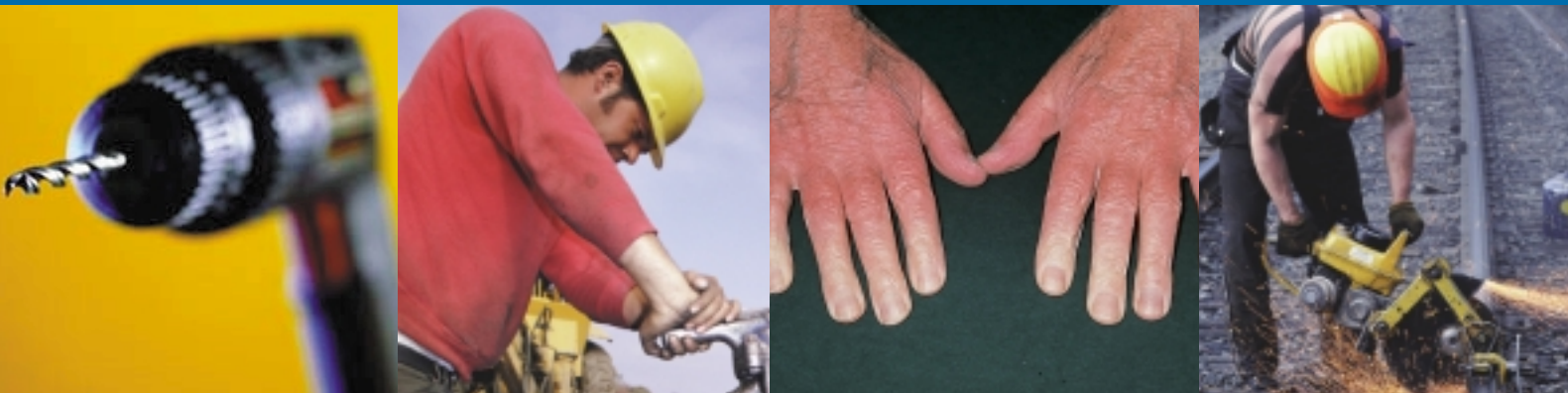
REVIEW OF FINDINGS BY PHYSICIAN

LABORATORY-BASED OBJECTIVE TESTING

ADVICE TO EMPLOYERS & EMPLOYEES

DETAILED ELECTRONIC RECORD KEEPING

European directives emphasise the importance of maintaining records.



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