



Did you know? ... Hand Arm Vibration

Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVS) is serious and disabling, and nearly 2 million people are at risk.

Around 36,000 people suffer from advanced forms of 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 of 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 a disabling condition called hand-arm vibration syndrome (HAVS) and carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS). In construction you are most at risk from these conditions if you 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 handheld 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
- Provide you with relevant information and training on noise and its risks to your health
- If necessary, carry out health surveillance

A good way of controlling exposure to vibration is to look for new or alternative work methods which eliminate or reduce exposure to vibration.

Some other control measures can include:

- Make sure new tools have vibration controls built in
- Recommend regular breaks or task rotation where possible
- Provide heating or suitable clothing and gloves
- Carry out regular maintenance on tools



What health checks do 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 you answers show that you may have symptoms then you would need to have a HAVS assessment. In the assessment you will be asked more detailed questions and your hands and arms 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, e.g. could you change to do something else for a while?
- Avoid storing tools in cold locations especially over night in the winter

If I spot any of these symptoms what do I need to do?

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

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 what it use to be?
- Is there a reduction in how you can do fiddly and fine tasks because your fingers don't work like they use to?



If you have answered yes to one, or more of these questions then you need to speak to someone. Speak to your manager or the occupational health nurse or doctor, for general advice you can contact CBH on 0845 873 7726



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 your social activities, like playing sport. At worst it could lead to amputation.

HAVS is preventable. But the damage caused by long term exposure to vibration is permanent and disabling ... **Don't let it happen to you**

Useful Links

HSE website – <http://www.hse.gov.uk/vibration/>

CBH – www.cbhscheme.com

