

Health priority plan: **Musculoskeletal disorders**

Work-related musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) are the most commonly reported cause of occupational ill health in Great Britain. They include disorders of the back, upper limbs and lower limbs, the former two being the most common.

MSDs are prevalent in all sectors but agriculture, fisheries, logistics and transport, construction and

health and social care have significantly higher than average rates.

Both physical and psychosocial factors can contribute to work-related MSDs, and they can be aggravated by people's activities outside work and their general health and fitness.

Current position

MSDs account for 41% of all ill health cases and 34% of all working days lost due to ill health.

The total number of working days lost in 2015/16 was 8.8 million, with an average of 16 days per case. Of the 539 000 cases, 176 000 were new in that year.

The overall economic cost to Great Britain, based on the latest available estimates, was just over £2 billion.

HSE statistics site: www.hse.gov.uk/statistics

Outcomes and priorities

We want to see:

- significant improvements in preventing and controlling exposure to MSDs, especially in construction, manufacturing, agriculture, logistics and transport, waste and recycling, and health and social care;
- a shift in emphasis away from manual handling training and towards risk elimination/reduction through design;
- a rise in HSE's/local authorities' regulatory profile;
- research, and development of new thinking, on the risks from new, flexible ways of working – such as the 'always on' culture, increasingly sedentary work and increased use of screen-based technologies;
- cross-industry learning about 'what works'.

What HSE will do to #HelpGBworkwell

We will lead and engage with others to improve workplace health and safety by:

- hosting an 18-monthly National Summit to raise the profile of MSDs;
- engaging and working with key stakeholders to maximise external synergies, align messages, raise awareness and promote approaches to tackle the diverse range of contributing and exacerbating factors associated with MSDs;
- using insight research to better understand how to reach and engage with prioritised sector audiences;
- using communications and social media channels that resonate with industry to promote benefits to both the business and the workforce;
- refreshing our online and other guidance, including up-to-date information on the use of screen-based equipment and the relevant impacts of sedentary working;
- working with partner organisations to promote design-based solutions for reducing MSD risks, and to encourage better ergonomic solutions through training and consultancy;
- where beneficial, developing and promoting digital versions of our MSD tools.

We will secure effective management and control of risk by:

- prioritising interventions, inspection activity and enforcement on those sectors/activities where MSDs pose the greatest risks and evaluating these findings to inform future approaches;
- maximising the effectiveness of investigations and publicity arising from enforcement outcomes;
- developing a suite of leading indicators and evaluation criteria by the end of 2018.

We will provide an effective regulatory framework by:

- developing a strategic programme of research on MSDs to help us better understand the underlying issues and how best to address them, by summer 2018.