



Unit 5 Occupational Diseases

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Name the various reportable diseases as identified under RIDDOR Regulation 8
- ✓ Identify the signs, or symptoms and probable causes of reportable diseases
- ✓ Determine whether or not a formal diagnosis is necessary for a reportable disease

Unit 5

Occupational Diseases

Reportable Diseases

Regulation 8 requires employers and self-employed people to report cases of certain diagnosed reportable diseases which are linked with occupational exposure to specified hazards. The reportable diseases and associated hazards are set out below.

- **Carpal Tunnel Syndrome:** where the person's work involves regular use of percussive or vibrating tools
- **Cramp of the hand or forearm:** where the person's work involves prolonged periods of repetitive movement of the fingers, hand or arm
- **Occupational dermatitis:** where the person's work involves significant or regular exposure to a known skin sensitiser or irritant
- **Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome:** where the person's work involves regular use of percussive or vibrating tools, or holding materials subject to percussive processes, or processes causing vibration
- **Occupational asthma:** where the person's work involves significant or regular exposure to a known respiratory sensitiser
- **Tendonitis or tenosynovitis:** in the hand or forearm, where the person's work is physically demanding and involves frequent, repetitive movements.

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome is caused by compression of the median nerve, which controls sensation and movement in the hand. It is not always caused by work-related factors. Typically, workplace risks are associated with the use of hand-held vibrating power tools, such as sanders, grinders, chainsaws etc.

Cramp of the Hand or Forearm

Where cramp is so severe as to lead to a clinical diagnosis, it can be severely debilitating, and impair a person's ability to carry out their normal work. This condition is reportable when it is chronic, and is associated with repetitive work movements. The condition is usually characterised by a person being unable to carry out a sequence of what were previously well co-ordinated movements.

An acute incident of cramp which may take place in the course of work is not reportable.

Occupational Dermatitis

Dermatitis is reportable when associated with work-related exposure to any chemical or biological irritant or sensitising agent. In particular, this includes any chemical with the warning 'may cause sensitisation by skin contact', or 'irritating to the skin'. Epoxy resins, latex, rubber

chemicals, soaps and cleaners, metalworking fluids, cement, wet work, enzymes and wood can all cause dermatitis.

Corrosive and irritating chemicals also lead to dermatitis. Construction work, health service work, rubber making, printing, paint spraying, agriculture, horticulture, electroplating, cleaning, catering, hairdressing and florists are all associated with dermatitis.

Dermatitis can be caused by exposure to a range of common agents found outside the workplace. If there is good evidence that the condition has been caused solely by such exposure rather than by exposure to an agent at work, it is not reportable.

Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome

Workers whose hands are regularly exposed to high vibration, eg in industries where vibratory tools and machines are used, may suffer from impaired blood circulation and damage to the nerves in the hand and arm; the disease is known as 'hand-arm vibration syndrome'. Other names used in industry include vibration white finger, dead finger, dead hand and white finger. Typically, workplace risks are associated with the use of hand-held vibrating power tools, such as percussive drills and hammers, rotary grinders and sanders, chainsaws etc. Risks are also associated with holding materials which vibrate while being processed by powered machinery such as pedestal grinders, riveting machines, rotary polishers etc.

Occupational Asthma

Asthma is reportable when associated with work-related exposure to any respiratory sensitiser. In particular, this will include any chemical with the warning 'may cause sensitisation by inhalation'. Known respiratory sensitisers include epoxy resin fumes, solder fume, grain dusts, wood dusts and other substances. Asthma is a common condition in the general population.

If there is good evidence that the condition was pre-existing, and was neither exacerbated nor triggered by exposure at work, the condition is not reportable.

Tendonitis and Tenosynovitis

Tendonitis and tenosynovitis are types of tendon injury. Tendonitis means inflammation of a tendon, and tenosynovitis means inflammation of the sheath (synovium) that surrounds a tendon. Workers who undertake physically demanding, repetitive work are at increased risk of developing these conditions. Physically demanding work includes (but is not restricted to) tasks involving repeated lifting and manipulation of objects (eg block-laying and assembly line work), and activities involving constrained postures or extremes of movement in the hand or wrist.

Diagnosis by a Doctor

A reportable disease must be diagnosed by a doctor. Diagnosis includes identifying any new symptoms, or any significant worsening of existing symptoms. For employees, they need to provide the diagnosis in writing to their employer. Doctors are encouraged to use standard wording when describing reportable diseases on written statements they make out for their patients.

The self-Employed

Self-employed people do not normally obtain written statements from their doctors when off work through illness. To take account of this, for a self-employed person, the doctor's verbal diagnosis of a reportable disease is sufficient for it to require reporting to the enforcing authority. As with employees, this only applies if their current job involves exposure to the associated hazard.

Further Reading:

- ✓ *CURRENT Diagnosis & Treatment Occupational & Environmental Medicine, 6th Edition (Current Occupational and Environmental Medicine) 6th Edition by Joseph LaDou (Author), Robert Harrison ,2021*
- ✓ *Occupational Health and Safety for the 21st Century 1st Edition by Robert H. Friis ,2015*