



HEALTH SURVEILLANCE: THE KEY TO A HAPPIER, HEALTHIER WORKPLACE?

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Part of the **ELAS** group of companies





Introduction

Ensuring employees work in a safe and healthy environment should be top of the agenda for any company. In many industries, this is achieved through health surveillance.

Work-related occupational diseases remain an issue throughout the UK. [Official figures](#) show that in 2017/18, 1.4 million employees suffered from a work-related ill health condition that was either new or long-standing.

Health surveillance is a legal requirement for some businesses, but what exactly is it and how can it bring benefits to certain sectors?

In this white paper, *Health Surveillance: The Key to a Happier, Healthier Workplace?*, we take a closer look at health surveillance, its benefits and why it makes sense for businesses. We will also consider how mobile medical units can help ensure compliance with this particular piece of health and safety legislation.

WHAT IS HEALTH SURVEILLANCE?

Health surveillance is a day-to-day reality for many industries. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) describes it as a system of ongoing health checks that certain sectors must ensure their employees have access to under workplace legislation.

For managers, it is a proactive measure that can help prevent workplace health problems, especially if it is closely aligned with internal risk assessments.

The HSE advises that health surveillance should never be used as a substitute for carrying out thorough risk assessments, or putting proper controls in place; instead, a risk assessment must be used to determine the need for health surveillance.



Is It Mandatory?

Health surveillance is a legal requirement for businesses whose employees are exposed to:

- noise
- vibration
- ionising radiation
- solvents
- fumes
- dust
- biological agents
- work in compressed air
- other substances hazardous to health

Although employers are legally required to protect and monitor the health and wellbeing of their workforce, they cannot force an employee to undergo a health assessment. However, it may no longer be possible for a member of staff to fulfil their role if they do not comply.

One way in which managers can ensure their workers attend the appointments is by including health surveillance in their employment contracts. This is an issue that needs to be dealt with by human resources departments, which can help make sure employers are meeting their legal obligations.

Getting Employees Involved

Health surveillance can be difficult to implement, especially given the sensitive nature of the information that is gained. Instead of seeing the assessments as something to be feared, employers should get their workers involved in the process and highlight how it can be of benefit to them.

Employers are legally required to consult their workers when it comes to health and safety. In situations where a union is in place, this will need to be carried out by liaising with the designated representative.

Explaining the necessity of health surveillance to the workforce can be an effective way of making sure they are fully on board with the process. The findings will ultimately benefit their wellbeing and make their workplace a better and safer place to be.

It is essential to treat any information gained through health surveillance as strictly confidential. The results that are gathered can go a long way to improving health and safety within a business, but it is critical that such data is treated with respect.

Make it clear exactly what information will be held about employees, who will have access to it and what the data will be used for. The [HSE](#) advises that the following details should be kept on health surveillance records:

- Surname
- Forename(s)
- Gender
- Date of birth
- Permanent address and postcode
- National Insurance number
- Date employment commenced

Creating an open work culture in this way can also help the overall process, as workers will be more inclined to report health and safety concerns as they arise, which in turn will increase a business' commitment to health surveillance.

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WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT?

Workplace illness and deaths are a stark reality for many businesses. [RoSPA](#) estimates there are as many as 13,000 deaths per year in the UK as a result of working in harmful conditions.

Employers have a duty of care towards their employees to make sure they are operating in safe conditions and have access to the necessary safeguards to protect themselves from danger.

The [Health and Safety at Work Act](#) was introduced in 1974 and provides a legal framework that promotes improved standards of care in businesses throughout the country. One of the key elements of the Act is that companies must provide adequate welfare provisions for their staff, alongside a safe working environment that is properly maintained.

Providing health surveillance is a legal requirement in its own right for some industries, but it can also be a means of ensuring compliance with other core pieces of health and safety legislation as well as improving the health and wellbeing of employees.



The Benefits To Business

Other positive impacts can result from providing a safe working environment. Staff retention and positive publicity are likely to follow, both of which can lead to lasting benefits for a company's bottom line and reputation.

There is also the issue of employee absence to consider. The [HSE](#) reveals that in 2017/18, 30.7 million working days were lost as a result of work-related ill health and non-fatal injuries. An average employee takes 7.1 days of sickness absence for injuries each year, or 19.8 days for ill health cases.

A report from the Institute for Employment Studies believes large UK employers spend as much as 16% of their annual salary costs on absence. However, the researchers noted that as much as half of these absence costs can be controlled by an employer and the decisions they make, which may include taking steps to improve their wellbeing in the workplace.

Productivity is another incentive for employers to arrange health assessments for their staff. Having workers who are fit and healthy can only benefit a business; the [World Health Organisation](#) states that not only are healthy workers more productive at work, they also experience increased job satisfaction and self-esteem.

Employers who take a genuine interest in the wellbeing of their staff will be rewarded with greater loyalty, which in turn leads to reduced staff turnover and eliminates the need for ongoing recruitment.

Investments in workplace health and safety can go some way towards achieving a better working environment. Taking proactive rather than reactive measures can help reduce the ongoing impact of sickness absence on a company, its operations and its bottom line.

Identifying Issues

Health surveillance is designed to highlight key issues within an organisation and the information gained can be used to improve different areas of a business.

Some of the issues that might be raised include:

- Early detection of ill health, enabling employers to introduce better controls to prevent problems getting worse
- Highlighting problems with workplace control measures, which can be used to inform future risk assessments
- Giving employees an opportunity to highlight any concerns they might have about their health
- Reinforce the training and education of employees, especially in relation to using protective equipment

“ AN AVERAGE EMPLOYEE TAKES 7.1 DAYS OF SICKNESS ABSENCE FOR INJURIES EACH YEAR ”

HEALTH SURVEILLANCE TO YOUR DOOR

Mobile Medical Units

Whether mandatory for a business or not, there are great benefits to be gained from enlisting the help of mobile health surveillance units. For some businesses, the logistics of getting employees to attend appointments can be difficult, which is why the units can be a much more practical solution.

As the name suggests, a mobile medical unit will visit a business for as long as required. For smaller companies, this might be a matter of hours, while for larger organisations, a visit lasting several days may need to be scheduled so every employee can be assessed.

Another major advantage is the flexibility of the units. They will visit a site at all hours, so workers on night shifts can benefit from the service as much as those who work a traditional 9-5 day.

Each company is different, which is why it is important for health surveillance to be tailored to their individual needs. Mobile medical units can accommodate this, as an initial consultation with a company will identify their requirements before putting together a bespoke plan that will carry out health surveillance to the highest possible standards.

Regardless of where or when a health surveillance check is carried out, the following information must be recorded by law:

- The date of the assessment and person carrying out the check
- The outcome of the test
- The decision of the occupational health professional as to whether the employee is fit enough to carry out their tasks and whether any restrictions are needed. This should be factual and only relate to the employee's functional ability and fitness for specific work.



MOBILE MEDICAL UNIT SERVICES

There are several key tests available to make sure companies are meeting their legal obligations. The tests that are arranged will depend on the nature of the industry and the risks faced by its employees.

ELAS Occupational Health offer a wide range of assessments from our mobile medical units, including:



Audiometric Testing

Who is it for?

This test is compulsory for workers who are exposed to noise levels exceeding 85 decibels on a daily basis. Ideally, audiometric testing should be performed as soon as an employee is subjected to noise, as this will provide a baseline reading against which any further results can be gauged.

What does the test involve?

The consultant will carry out an ear examination as well as an electronic audiometry assessment.



Hand Arm Vibration (HAVS) Testing

Who is it for?

Anyone who works with vibrating tools must undergo HAVS assessments under the Control of Vibration at Work Regulations 2005.

What does the test involve?

There are several stages to the test, starting with a health questionnaire and face-to-face assessment. If HAVS is diagnosed, recommendations will be made as to how to manage the condition, while an investigation takes place into the original cause of the problem.



Skin Assessment

Who is it for?

Skin assessments are recommended for anyone who works with the following:

- solvents used in paint, adhesive or other surface coatings
- oils and grease
- degreasers, descalers and detergents
- disinfectants
- bitumen or asphalt
- epoxy resins and hardeners
- sealants
- release agents (mould oils) used by farm workers

What does the test involve?

Employees will be asked to fill in a screening questionnaire and will receive a physical skin examination.



Spirometry

Who is it for?

Spirometry is mandatory in industries where workers might be exposed to hazardous substances such as gas, vapours and dust. It is the responsibility of the employer to control and monitor this exposure.

What does the test involve?

Workers will be asked to exhale quickly and forcefully to determine how much air they can breathe out. Several readings may be taken in order to record an average, which can then be used to diagnose specific lung conditions.

What happens to the results?

The employee will receive a scaled down version of the assessment results on the day of their appointment. The final results will then be made available to the employer by logging into a dedicated occupational health portal.

Any concerns highlighted from the results will be passed on to the employee, who will also be informed that they need a referral.

The results can also be used by employers to inform their health and safety practices, potentially leading to new or more stringent measures being implemented to protect their workers.



WHY CHOOSE US?

ELAS Occupational Health has one of the largest fleets of mobile medical units in the UK, with each vehicle equipped with the necessary equipment to carry out health surveillance to the highest standard.

Our team comprises physicians, nurses and technicians who are on hand to help you fulfil your legal duty of care to your employees. Regardless of whether you have one employee or thousands, we provide tailored and cost effective health surveillance that meets your individual needs.

All our mobile medical units are deployed with no hidden costs. You won't be charged extra for mileage, travel or accommodation - simply let us know how many employees you have, the tests they require and some suitable dates and we will arrange the rest.

To find out more about health surveillance and our mobile medical units, give us a call on 08450 50 40 60.





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