

RESPIRATORY HEALTH SURVEILLANCE – ADVICE FOR EMPLOYEES

Introduction:

This information is aimed at employees whose work involves exposure to respiratory sensitisers

What are Respiratory Sensitisers?

Respiratory sensitisers are substances that can cause an allergic reaction in some people, through causing a change in people's airways known as a "hypersensitive state" and this can result in asthma. Not everyone who becomes sensitised develops asthma, but once the lungs become sensitised, even at low levels, further exposure may trigger an asthma attack. Respiratory sensitisers can include but are not limited to latex, wood dusts, fish proteins, animal excreta/secretions, isocyanates.

What can I do to, reduce my risk?

Under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) regulations, your employer is legally required to undertake a risk assessment of the workplace in order to identify any potential hazards and where possible, eliminate these. Where it is not possible to eliminate the substance, then controls must be implemented to protect those working in these areas. These controls can include ventilation, screens, hoods, or close-fitting face masks. Therefore, in order to reduce your risk, it is important that you adhere to these control measures at all times and ensure any PPE (personal protective equipment) is in a good state of repair. In order to monitor the effectiveness of control measures, it is also important that you engage fully in the health surveillance programme. This ensures that any early symptoms that may indicate sensitisation is picked up at the earliest stage and thus reduce the risk of you developing lung disease.

What symptoms may I experience that suggests that I may be developing sensitisation?

Early symptoms of sensitisation may include:

- Rhinitis (runny eyes and nose)
- Conjunctivitis (itchy eyes)
- Skin rashes
- Wheezing
- Tightness of chest
- Breathlessness
- Coughing

If you develop any of these symptoms do not wait until your next routine health surveillance to report these, but report to your manager and OH as soon as they occur, so that they can be fully investigated. If the symptoms are severe, please also arrange to speak to your GP.

Health Surveillance

To monitor your health, you will be asked by your manager and/or Occupational Health to complete a screening questionnaire prior to commencing work and then yearly. It is important that you complete this form accurately and in full. Depending on the risk assessment and / or if you are reporting any symptoms, you will be contacted by Occupational Health for an assessment. This may include a referral to an Occupational Physician.

Showing symptoms consistent with sensitisation or being formally diagnosed with a respiratory condition, does not necessarily mean that you would be considered unfit for your role. Instead, it may mean that additional controls to limit your exposure are implemented to enable you to work without risk to your health.



Further information regarding [Asthma? Critical assessments of the evidence for agents implicated in occupational asthma \(hse.gov.uk\)](https://www.hse.gov.uk/asthma/)