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## **Universal Access to Occupational Health** *Public Health Perspectives*

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# The Public Health role of Occupational Health



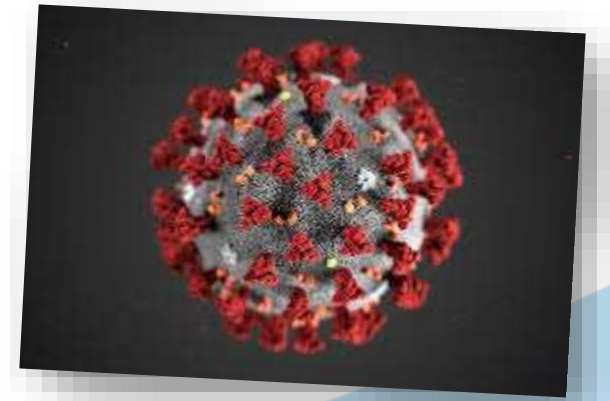
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- Health outcomes and employment are intrinsically linked
- With c.33 million employees in the UK, the risk assessment, prevention, and health promotion roles of OH have a huge impact
- These interventions are also cost-effective; investments in OH reduce the costs of sickness, absenteeism, and unemployment
- We must support universal access to Occupational Health to protect and improve the public's health and grow our economy



# Occupational Health and COVID-19

- COVID-19 continues to dominate the public health landscape - we still have a long way to go to recover from the pandemic
- July 2021 ONS data estimates 962,000 people in the UK are experiencing long-term effects of coronavirus; 'long-COVID' – with 34,000 of these people under 16
- Health and our economy are linked, we must tackle financial and economic problems to protect health and recover from COVID-19 – not 'either or'
- Changing work environments poses challenges for workplace health – OH expertise critical in supporting return to work/ risk assessment/ vaccine delivery etc



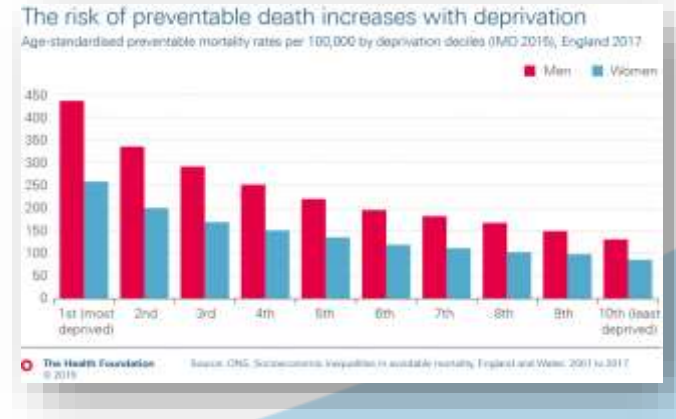
# Access to occupational health

- It is unacceptable that 50% of UK workers do not have access to OH services
- Lack of access to OH compounds pre-existing health inequalities for many of these workers who may be in low-paid or precarious employment
- With 1.6 million UK employees reporting work-related ill health, the importance of universal access to OH in protecting and improving health is clear
- We must also understand health and the economy as interlinked; ill-health estimated to cost the UK economy £100bn



# Health inequalities

- In the poorest 15% of council areas in Great Britain, over a fifth of the working-age population have a work-limiting health condition or impairment
- The employment rate for people with a work-limiting condition is 47%, compared with 81% for people without
- Fair and stable employment conditions, including safeguarding delivered by OH specialists, can help reduce these inequalities
- Government must translate proposals to improve access to Occupational Health into action – “Health is Everyone’s Business” consultation



# Public Health and Occupational Health working together



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- FPH support SOMs briefing note on Universal access to Occupational Health
- Workplace testing and vaccination arrangements
- Occupational medicine expertise should help inform the future of health protection and improvement as the public health system evolves
- A role for Occupational Health as an advocate for reducing health inequalities
- Collaboration at local, regional, national level
- Ensure that we're better prepared for any future pandemics





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