



# **A Guide for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs)**

to Occupational Health &  
Wellbeing in the Workplace

# Building a Healthy Business

**COHPA**

Advancing Occupational Health & Wellbeing

A healthy team is vital to an organisation's overall success.

Even a few days off sick for a key staff member can affect your business. Currently, a record 2.5 million\* people are off work due to ill-health.

Research shows that two out of three sickness absences could be prevented with Occupational Health interventions, yet only half of businesses in the UK work with an Occupational Health provider.

What's more, small and medium businesses are five times less likely than large companies to procure Occupational Health support.

*\* Based on ONS Data July 2023*

**ONLY  
1 in 2**

Companies in the UK have access to **Occupational Health**

## What is Occupational Health?

Occupational Health assists employers to look after the health of their employees.

Occupational Health professionals support people to return to and stay at work, with issues ranging from Mental Health, Musculoskeletal health, Long COVID, and Women's health.

Occupational Health professionals include Doctors, Nurses, and Technicians. They are trained to improve health in the workplace.

## What does Occupational Health do?

- Make sure people are fit enough to do their job
- Help people back to work if they have been off sick
- Support people in the workplace with illness and disability
- Avoid future health problems due to the demands of the job
- Offer advice on how employees can manage their own health and wellbeing

# Why use Occupational Health?

As an employer, you are required by law to prevent physical and mental ill health that may occur in your workers because of your business activities.

Using an Occupational Health company will ensure your employees are healthy to do the job and remain healthy whilst at work.

## Health Surveillance

Health Surveillance is required annually, usually (but not exclusively) for job roles which may affect the health of the worker. Risk factors could include: noisy environments that could cause hearing problems, paint spraying that could cause breathing problems, and exposure to dangerous substances such as asbestos that can be linked to diseases such as cancer.

Typical tests include sight, audio, hand arm vibration, lung function (also known as spirometry) and medicals to assess the risk of working with dangerous substances such as isocyanate, asbestos, and lead. These tests are required by law if a risk is identified.

An Occupational Health company will provide the tests every year (for a minimum of seven years). The test results will be compared year on year and if problems arise the employee can be referred for a report by an Occupational Health expert. The report will advise if the problem is work related and what the employer can do to rectify this by putting special measures in place.

Here are some of the services they offer in more detail:

## Sickness Absence and Management Referrals

When an employee is off work sick, even for a few days, it can put real pressure on the rest of the staff and your company's financial performance.

Occupational Health professionals work with the employee and employer to make sure the employee returns to work as soon as they can, by suggesting revisions to job roles, working hours and other reasonable adjustments. This is especially important for those off sick long term.

Many employees are not off work but need advice on how to manage a health condition. Again, Occupational Health will work with employees and the employer to minimise the impact of their health condition on their work. This reduces absenteeism and helps improve "presenteeism" as the person is supported properly in the workplace. Examples of health conditions are varied, but include fibromyalgia, anxiety, menopause, Long COVID and chronic pain.

## Improving General Health & Wellbeing

Companies are increasingly recognising that a focus on health and wellbeing can assist with staff retention and recruitment.

Occupational Health professionals use evidence-based strategies, working alongside employers, to improve employee health and overall wellbeing.



## Fit to Work

These are assessments of an employee to make sure that they are physically and mentally fit to fulfil their job. The starting point for this is a 'pre-employment' questionnaire. The questionnaires are reviewed by an Occupational Health professional who will highlight anything that could affect the employee's ability to work, and they will then be referred for a more detailed medical and report.

Certain industries require 'Fit to Work' certificates or specific medicals to ensure that the employee is fit to undertake specific tasks expected of them. This in turn will reduce accidents and detect health issues early. These tests are

usually required every one to three years; they are not required by law, but are considered best practice.

Examples of these medicals include Working at Height, Forklift Truck Medicals, Oil and Gas Medicals, Safety Critical Medicals and Exposure Prone Procedures.

Part of this service can also include a vaccination programme to make sure employees are protected against any harmful illnesses, examples are flu vaccinations and also HepB testing and vaccinations.

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# Next Steps

Occupational Health will work alongside your business to give the best advice on how to manage the health and wellbeing of your employees.

To find an Occupational Health company, or to find out more, go to:

 [www.som.org.uk](http://www.som.org.uk)  
Supporting occupational health and wellbeing professionals The Society of Occupational Medicine

 [www.cohpa.org](http://www.cohpa.org)  
The Commercial Occupational Health Providers Association

 [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk)  
The Health and Safety Executive



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