

Safety & Health Training: Signs and Symptoms of Workplace-Related Illness

Are occupational illnesses a concern in your workplace? Occupational illnesses may result from acute and/or chronic exposures to hazardous conditions or substances at work:

- *Acute* – short-term health conditions usually lasting from seconds to hours at a time, showing up immediately or soon after a single exposure
- *Chronic* – long-term, potentially more permanent, health conditions, showing up over a long period of time from continued or repeated exposures.

Can your employees recognize the signs and symptoms of occupational illnesses? A lack of training on signs and symptoms of work-related illness may lead to delayed recognition, reporting, and assessment of the illness, possibly causing more serious symptoms or death to occur.



Occupational Illness

Any abnormal health condition or disorder resulting from an event(s) or exposure(s) in the work environment

Image retrieved from [Google Images](#)

Training your workforce prevents this issue. Use the information in this one pager to create a signs and symptoms of workplace-related illness training in your workplace.

HAZARD IDENTIFICATION & PREVENTION

Employ a hazard identification process to find and record hazards in your workplace. Use your knowledge of workplace hazards to determine signs and symptoms of potential work-related illnesses. The hazard identification process is important so you know what signs and symptoms to include in your training. Use licensed health care professionals for prevention, early recognition, and treatment of occupational illnesses.

Steps to Consider in Your Hazard Recognition Process

Steps taken from Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)

- 
- Collect existing information about workplace hazards
 - Inspect the workplace for safety hazards
 - Identify health hazards
 - Conduct incident investigations
 - Identify hazards associated with emergency and non-routine situations
 - Characterize the nature of identified hazards
 - Determine interim control measures to use
 - Prioritize hazards for control

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Educate your managers, supervisors, non-supervisory employees, and contractors on the signs and symptoms of work-related illnesses to equip them with the knowledge needed to recognize exposure. Occupational illnesses vary per workplace and job. Use the results from your hazard identification process and input from licensed health care professionals to develop your training. Make sure your training supports the work-related illnesses specific to your workplace. Identify the target audience for your training since you may need different trainings for employees based on assigned job duties. You wouldn't train an office employee on the signs and symptoms of x-ray exposure when they don't work near x-ray machines.

Consider including the following topics in your training:

- Definition of occupational illnesses
- Potential occupational hazard exposures
- Possible work-related illnesses
- Signs and symptoms of occupational illnesses
- Prevention measures
- Reporting procedures
- When to see a doctor.

Provide training:

- As required by regulation
- Prior to job assignment
- At the time of initial assignment
- Periodically, to serve as a refresher
- When an employee demonstrates they do not have the understanding and skills required to safely perform assigned duties
- When changes occur rendering previous training inadequate or incomplete.

In addition, ensure each work shift has persons available trained in first aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), automated external defibrillators (AEDs), and/or emergency medical care to respond to work-related illnesses when they occur. These persons must be available within a reasonable time and distance from your organization.

For additional information on the SMCX's services, please visit the SMCX-hosted website at: <https://www.smscx.org/>.

Examples of Illnesses Stemming from Exposure to Work-Related Hazards

Hazard	Example Illness
Heat/cold	Heat stress, frostbite
Noise	Hearing loss
Repetitive motion, awkward postures, vibration	Musculoskeletal disorders
Biological agents (e.g., anthrax, COVID-19, mold)	Infectious diseases, allergies, botulism
Heavy metals (e.g., arsenic, beryllium, cadmium, hexavalent chromium, lead)	Toxic metal poisoning, metal fume fever
Radiation (e.g., x-rays, radium, lasers)	Radiation sickness
Dusts (e.g., silica, fiberglass)	Silicosis
Bloodborne pathogens (e.g., blood, other potentially infectious material)	Hepatitis B, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)
Direct contact with chemicals	Eczema, dermatitis, chemical burns
Fibers (e.g. asbestos)	Asbestosis, mesothelioma
Gases (e.g., carbon monoxide, hydrogen sulfide)	Carbon monoxide poisoning, pulmonary edema