

What is Health surveillance?

“Health surveillance is putting in place systematic, regular and appropriate procedures to detect early signs of work related ill health and then acting upon the results. The aim is to identify and protect workers at increased risk and to check the long term effectiveness of measures to control risks to health. Employers are obliged to ensure that appropriate health surveillance is made available to employees for whom a risk assessment reveals a risk to their health.” HSA 2007

Health surveillance involves periodically enquiring about symptoms that may indicate work related illness, carrying out a medical assessment to look for early signs of work related illness and performing specific tests such as eye tests or lung tests. The tests performed will depend on the hazards in your work environment. The surveillance intervals will depend on the risk assessment and on current health and safety legislation and guidelines.

Health surveillance forms part of the overall health and safety management system in your workplace. The program will assist improving health and safety practices in your workplace. Under Health and Safety legislation, employees are obliged to co-operate with procedures necessary to protect their health and safety.

Health surveillance may also be used as an opportunity to assess fitness to work according to required legal standards e.g. food hygiene screening in high risk food handlers, eye sight tests in heavy goods vehicle drivers and aerobic capacity in firefighters.

What happens during the health surveillance program?

1. Questionnaire:

Prior to the day of surveillance you will be given a questionnaire to complete. The questionnaire requests details of your health status and enquires about symptoms of potential work related illness. Please bring the completed questionnaire to the assessment.

2. Occupational health nurse assessment:

The occupational health nurse will greet you and go through the questionnaire. The OHN will discuss any concerns that you may have about the program or your health.

The OHN will perform basic assessments such as height, weight, body mass index, urinalysis, blood pressure and exposed skin examination.

The OHN will perform the required tests e.g. audiometry hearing test, keystone vision test or spirometry lung test. The OHN will take blood tests if required for biological monitoring of chemical hazards.

The OHN will discuss the results of any tests provide you with individualized information and advice to protect your health and safety. If necessary the OHN will refer you to your GP for further treatment of any non work related illness.

The initial consultation and tests performed by the OHN will identify employees who may have health problems that require further medical assessment. Therefore, if the OHN deems it necessary you will be referred for a follow up consultation with the occupational health physician OHP. On completion of the consultation the OHN will issue a health surveillance report to the employer.

→ *What will the nurse’s health surveillance report to my employer contain?*

- Your name, employee number or address,
- Your occupation and work department.
- The dates you attended for assessment.
- What tests were performed, e.g. eye test, lung test.
- The interval for the next surveillance
- If you require referral to the OHP

3. Occupational health physician assessment:

Only if there are any concerns from the health surveillance you will be referred to the Specialist in Occupational Medicine.

The OHP will go through the questionnaire and results of health surveillance performed by the OHN. The OHP will conduct a relevant physical examination e.g. of the heart and lungs.

The OHP will discuss the significance of any results and clinical findings with you.

If work related illness is detected or suspected the OHP will arrange further investigation, treatment and or referral to another specialist as necessary e.g. an ENT consultant for assessment of hearing problems.

The OHP will refer you to your GP for treatment if a non work related illness is detected e.g. high blood pressure.

On completion of the assessment the OHP will issue a medical assessment report to your employer.

→ *What will the OHP’s medical assessment report to my employer contain?*

- Your name, employee number or address, occupation and work department.
- The dates you attended for medical assessment.
- If you require referral to another doctor for further investigation
- If a work related illness is detected and if this requires further treatment or investigation
- Follow up appointments with occupational health team
- If any restrictions or adjustments to you work duties are necessary to protect your health and safety and that of your co-workers and the time frame for such restrictions

Data protection, consent and confidentiality issues:

You will be required to give your written consent to take part in the program. If health issues are identified you will be requested to give your written consent to allow disclosure to your employer and to allow the OHP communicate and liaise with your own doctors.

The term “medical condition” may be used to describe an illness that you do not wish disclosed to your employer. The implications of any health problems rather than the specific nature of these problems will be given to the employer.



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Health surveillance: a guide for the employee

Under the Data Protection, Freedom of Information Acts and Health and Safety Acts you have access to medical files, results and reports. However, you must put your request in writing.