



CPD4dentalnurses

YOUR FUTURE IN YOUR HANDS

Health and Safety Management in Dental Practice

Aims: This article will discuss health and safety legislation and how to implement and manage health and safety issues in dental practice.

Objectives: On completion of this verifiable CPD article the participant will be able to demonstrate, through completion of a questionnaire, the ability to:

- Identify legislation relating to health and safety in dental practice.
- Have knowledge of the steps an employer should take to protect employees.
- Recognise the steps employees are responsible for regarding health and safety.
- Understand considerations when undertaking a health and safety risk assessment.
- Have knowledge of workplace facilities that should be in place to comply with health and safety legislation.
- Identify responsibilities of both employer and employee regarding personal protective equipment (PPE).

Introduction



In general, health and safety laws apply to all businesses, no matter how small. If you are an employer, or a self-employed person, you are responsible for health and safety in your business. By taking the right precautions, risks can be minimised, protecting employees, patients and the business itself. Health and safety management should be a straightforward part of managing the workplace as a whole. It involves practical

steps that protect people from harm and at the same time protects the future success and the growth of any business.¹

Health and safety laws are there to protect the employer, their employees, and the public from workplace dangers. The approach that should be taken should be proportionate to the size of the business and the nature of the business activity. For most small, low-risk businesses, the steps that are needed are straightforward. If the business has fewer than five employees, you must still complete a risk assessment, but it is not a requirement to write it down. However, in dental practice it is good practice to do so.²

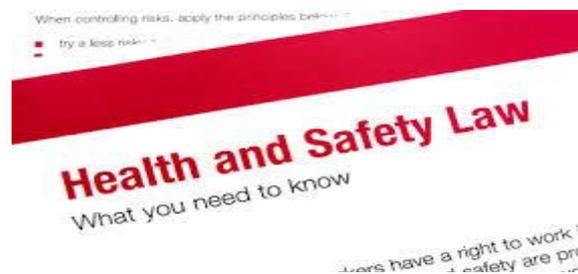
The law on health and safety at work is there to:

- Stop you getting hurt at work.
- To stop you getting ill because of work.

The law says:

- All workers have a right to work in places that are safe.
- The employer must keep you safe at work.
- You must help too.

Legislation for Health and Safety in Dental Practice



Health and Safety legislation is complex and covers a range of activities. The most applicable legislation that could be applied to dental practice include the following: (However, this list is not exhaustive)

- ✓ Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 (HASAWA)
- ✓ The Workplace (Health, Safety & Welfare) Regulation 1992
- ✓ Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002
- ✓ The Provision & Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998
- ✓ The Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 amended 2002
- ✓ Personal Protective Equipment at Work (Amendment) Regulations 2002
- ✓ Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR)
- ✓ Ionising Radiation Regulations (IRR17)
- ✓ Ionising Radiation Regulations Medical Exposure) (2017) (IR(ME)R17
- ✓ The Management of Health and Safety Regulations 1999

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (also referred to as HSWA, the HSW Act, the 1974 Act or HASAWA), is the primary piece of legislation covering occupational health and safety in Great Britain. The Health and Safety Executive, with local authorities (and other enforcing authorities), is responsible for enforcing the Act and a number of other Acts and Statutory Instruments relevant to the working environment.⁴

What an employer must do to keep you safe at work

1. Think about what could harm you at work. Implement things that will stop anything that might harm you.
2. Tell you in a way you can understand:
 - What they are doing to keep you safe.
 - Who is responsible for keeping you safe.
3. Ask you and your health and safety representative what you think about what is being done to keep everyone safe. (A health and safety representative is the person who talks to your employer about your health and safety).
4. Give you free training so you can do your job safely.
5. Give you the right tools and clothes to help keep you safe. They must also make sure the tools and clothes are in good condition (PPE).
6. Make sure there are toilets, places to wash, and drinking water for workers.
7. Make sure you get good first-aid if you need it.
8. Tell the Health and Safety Executive's Incident Contact Centre about anyone who is killed or has a major injury because of work.
9. Have insurance that covers you in case you get hurt or ill because of work. They must keep a copy of the insurance papers where you can see them if you want.
10. Work with other employers or people who work in the same place to make sure, everyone who works there is safe.⁵

What you must do to keep yourself and other people safe at work

1. Remember to do what you have been taught when you use tools and other things at work.
2. Be careful about your own and other people's health and safety.
3. Do what your employer says about health and safety.
4. Tell someone if you think you or others are at risk at work. You

should tell your employer, your boss, or the health and safety representative if there are any problems with health and safety at work.⁵

Appoint a Competent Person

Employers must appoint someone competent to help them meet the health and safety duties. A competent person is someone with the necessary skills, knowledge, and experience to manage health and safety. The competent person may be the employer themselves or they may appoint one or more of their employees.

Qualifications and Training

It is not essential for the competent person to have formal qualifications and they are not required to have formal training by law, but it may help. The competent person could be:

- The employer.
- One of the staff members.
- Someone outside of the business.

Risk Assessment



The employer must control the health and safety risks in the workplace. To do this they need to think about what, in their business, might cause harm to people and decide whether they are taking reasonable steps to prevent that harm. This is known as a **risk assessment**.



Even though the employer is probably already taking steps to protect the employees, the risk assessment will identify if they have covered all that is needed. A risk assessment is not about creating huge amounts of paperwork, but rather about identifying sensible measures to control the risks in the workplace.

A record of the significant findings should be kept, but there is no need to record everyday risks. Keep it simple and focus on controls. The law does not expect the employer to remove all risks, but to protect people by putting in place measures to control those risks, so far as reasonably practicable. The risk assessment need only include what the employer could reasonably be expected to know – they are not expected to anticipate unforeseeable risks.²

Steps to Consider When Assessing Risk

- A good starting point is to walk around the workplace and look for any hazards (things that may cause harm). Then think about the risk, which is the chance, high or low, of somebody being harmed by a hazard, and how serious the harm could be.
- Think about how accidents could happen and who might be harmed.
- Ask employees what they think the hazards are, as they may notice things that are not obvious and may have some good ideas on how to control the risks.
- Concentrate on the real risks – those that are most likely to cause harm.
- Consider the measures that are already being taken to control the risks and decide if everything has been covered that needs to be.
- Once the risks have been identified and it has been decided how to control them, appropriate measures should be put in place.
- Record any significant findings.
- Any paperwork produced should help to manage the risks in the business and tell people what they need to know.
- For most people this does not need to be a big exercise – just note the main points down about the significant risks and what was concluded.
- Few workplaces stay the same and sooner or later there will be new equipment, substances or procedures that could lead to new hazards; and, therefore, it makes sense to review risk assessments on a regular basis. If anything significant changes, check the risk assessment and update it and any staff training required.²

Don't forget to consider everyone who could be harmed:

- Some workers may have particular requirements, so consider diversity.
- Think about homeworkers, and people who might not be in the workplace all the time, such as visitors, contractors, and maintenance workers.
- Take members of the public into account if they could be hurt by your work activities.
- If you share a workplace with another business, you will need to consider how your work affects others and how their work affects you and your staff. Talk to each other and work together to make sure controls are in place.²

Health and Safety Policy



Describing how health and safety is managed in a business will let employees and others know about the commitment to health and safety. This will be your health and safety policy. It should clearly say who does what, when and how and the risk assessment will act as a useful tool to write and update the policy. All employees should be aware of the policy and familiar with the policy.

Training

All employees need to know how to work safely and without risks to health. The employer must provide clear instructions and information, and adequate training, for employees.

Do not forget contractors and self-employed people who may be working and make sure everyone has the right level of information on:

- Hazards and risks they may face, if any.
- Measures in place to deal with those hazards and risks, if necessary.
- How to follow any emergency procedures. When training is provided, ask employees what they think about it, to make sure it's relevant and effective.
- Keeping training records that will help identify when refresher training might be needed.
- Health and safety training should take place during working hours, and it must not be paid for by employees.

Some employees may have particular health and safety training needs, for example:

- New recruits.
- People changing jobs or taking on extra responsibilities.
- Young employees, who are particularly vulnerable to accidents.
- Health and safety representatives.²

Workplace Facilities

Employers must provide the right workplace facilities for everyone in the workplace, including people with disabilities.

Welfare facilities

- ✓ Toilets and hand basins, with soap and towels or a hand-dryer.
- ✓ Drinking water.
- ✓ A place to store clothing (and somewhere to change if special clothing is worn for work).
- ✓ Somewhere to rest and eat meals.

Health issues

- ✓ Good ventilation – a supply of fresh, clean air drawn from outside or a ventilation system.
- ✓ A reasonable working temperature (usually at least 16 °C, or 13 °C for strenuous work, unless other laws require lower temperatures).
- ✓ Lighting suitable for the work being carried out.
- ✓ Enough room space and suitable workstations and seating.
- ✓ A clean workplace with appropriate waste containers.

Safety issues

- ✓ Properly maintain the premises and work equipment.
- ✓ Keep floors and traffic routes free from obstruction.
- ✓ Have windows that can be opened and also cleaned safely.²

Health Surveillance and Occupational Health

Dental practices should implement a structured health surveillance programme as part of their occupational health responsibilities. Routine surveillance helps to identify and prevent work-related health issues at an early stage. For example, staff who regularly use display screens for patient records and digital imaging should undergo periodic eye tests to comply with the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations.

Hearing checks may be necessary for team members who are exposed to ultrasonic scalers or other high-frequency dental equipment for prolonged periods, reducing the risk of occupational hearing loss.

Additionally, under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations, skin surveillance should be in place to monitor for early signs of contact dermatitis caused by frequent exposure to gloves, disinfectants, and other dental materials. Establishing a robust occupational health programme ensures compliance with legal obligations, promotes staff wellbeing, and supports a safer dental working environment.

First aid

The employer must have first-aid arrangements in the workplace. They are responsible for making sure their employees receive immediate attention if they are taken ill or are injured at work. Accidents and illness can happen at any time and first aid can save lives and prevent minor injuries from becoming major ones.

As a minimum, they must have:

- A suitably stocked first-aid box.
- An appointed person to take charge of first-aid arrangements.
- Information for all employees giving details of first-aid arrangements.

The employer might decide that they need a first aider. This is someone who has been trained by a competent first-aid training provider.

Accident Book

A record should be kept of any workplace accidents or work-related illnesses/diseases. If there are more than 10 employees, this is required by law. This can help identify any risks.² A Health and Safety Poster should be displayed in all workplaces.

 **Health and Safety Law**
What you need to know

All workers have a right to work in places where risks to their health and safety are properly controlled. Health and safety is about stopping you getting hurt at work or ill through work. Your employer is responsible for health and safety, but you must help.



What employers must do for you

- 1 Think who could be hurt or ill and the prevention work is their part of risk assessment.
- 2 If a job you can undertake, make sure you will be controlled and that you who is responsible for it.
- 3 Control and work with you and your health and safety representatives in preventing someone from being on the workplace.
- 4 Know of things you can do to health and safety training you must do your job.
- 5 Know of things you can do to prevent you from being on the workplace if a priority task is done.



What you must do

- 6 Provide safety, working methods and drink a water.
- 7 Provide adequate first aid facilities.
- 8 Report major injuries and fatalities or work to the Health and Safety Commission (HSC) 200 0000.
- 9 Help to ensure that you are not overworked or ill through work. Consider if you are carrying out work in a way that is not safe or if you are carrying out work in a way that is not safe.
- 10 Work with any other employees of your employer in preventing or reducing the risk to your health and safety in your work.



What you must do

- 1 Before the training you have received, you must, as a worker, know your employer has given you.
- 2 Take reasonable care of your own and other people's health and safety.
- 3 Co-operate with your employer on health and safety.
- 4 Tell someone (your employer, supervisor, or health and safety representative) if you think the work or workplace practices are putting your health and safety at risk.



If there's a problem

- 1 If you are worried about health and safety in your workplace, talk to your employer, supervisor, or health and safety representative.
- 2 You can also look in our website for general information about health and safety at work.
- 3 If after talking with your employer, you are still worried, you can find the address of your local office on our website for health and safety with the Department of Health, Dublin. Contact us on 011 919 2000 or www.hse.ie.

More health and safety information:

Other health and safety contacts:

Fire safety
You can get advice on the rules from the Fire and Rescue Services or your workplace fire officer.

Employment rights
Find out more about your employment rights at www.garda.ie.

HSE Health and Safety Executive

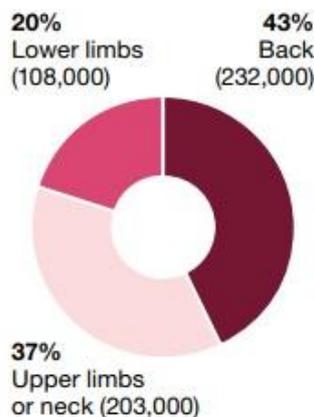
Liability insurance should be in place for all businesses that have employees.

Manual Handling

Incorrect manual handling is one of the most common causes of injury at work. It can result in work related musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs). It can happen in any workplace including dental practice. It may involve heavy manual lifting, awkward postures, manual materials handling or may exaggerate an existing injury.¹

In 2023/2024, the Health and Safety Executive reported that 543,000 workers suffered from work-related musculoskeletal disorders and 7.8 million working days were lost due to musculoskeletal disorders.⁵

Musculoskeletal disorders by affected area, 2023/24



Preventive measures are often simple and cost-effective and the Care Quality Commission state that each dental practice should have a manual handling policy in place and all employees should undergo training in risk assessment of manual handling and safe manual handling practises.⁶

Control of Substances Hazardous to Health



The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (COSHH) (as amended) is a United Kingdom Statutory Instrument that states general requirements on employers to protect employees and other persons from the hazards of substances used at work by:

- Risk assessment;
- control of exposure;
- health surveillance; and,
- incident planning.⁷

Every year, thousands of workers are made ill by exposure to hazardous substances which can cause; lung disease, such as asthma, skin disease, such as dermatitis and cancer. It is the employers' responsibility to control exposure, minimise risk and protect employees' health.⁸

Many products and substances in the workplace can be harmful and cause ill health, however, if used properly they almost never do. It is the employers' responsibility to look at each substance used in the workplace and complete a risk assessment and staff training, if necessary, in the use of the product. COSHH applies to a wide range of substances and preparations (mixtures of two or more substances) which have the potential to cause harm to health if they are ingested, inhaled, or are absorbed by, or come into contact with, the skin, or other body membranes. Hazardous substances can occur in many forms, including solids, liquids, vapours, gases and fumes. They can also be simple asphyxiants or biological agents.

Employers should regard a substance as hazardous to health if it is hazardous in the form in which it may occur in the work activity. A substance hazardous to health need not be just a chemical compound, it can also include mixtures of compounds, micro-organisms, blood, or natural materials, such as flour, stone or wood dust.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)



Employers should establish procedures to ensure that control measures, including PPE and any other item or facility, are properly used or applied and are not made less effective by other work practices or by improper use. The procedures should include:

- Visual checks and observations at appropriate intervals;
- ensuring that where more than one item of PPE is being worn, the different items are compatible;
- supervising employees to ensure that the defined methods of work are being followed; and,
- monitoring systems for the effective use of the PPE.⁹

Employees' duties for PPE

Employees should use the control measures in the way they are intended to be used and as they have been instructed. In particular, they should:

- Follow the defined methods of work.
- Wear the PPE provided, correctly and in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.
- Store the PPE, when not in use, in the accommodation provided.
- Remove any PPE which could cause contamination before eating, drinking or smoking.
- Maintain a high standard of personal hygiene and make proper use of the facilities provided for washing, showering or bathing and for eating and drinking.

Report promptly to the appointed person, e.g., supervisor or safety representative, any defects discovered in any control measure, including defined methods of work, device or facility, or any PPE.⁹

Blood Borne Viruses (BBVs) in Dental Practice

It is highly unlikely that anyone would become infected through normal social contact, but in the dental practice there is a risk of exposure through direct contact with infected blood, or body fluids i.e., saliva by accidental contamination. This could be as a result of a needle stick injury or sharp instrument injury. Infected blood could also spread through contamination of open wounds, skin abrasions, skin that has been damaged due to eczema or through splashes to the eyes, nose, or mouth.

It is the employer's legal responsibility to protect the health of their employees. A safety policy should be in place outlining the risks and the measures needed to control them. It is the employer's responsibility which is outlined in COSHH 2002 (as amended) to assess the risk for their employees and ensure adequate training and instruction for their employees.

In dental practice this means that everyone in contact with BBVs is adequately immunised (this should be provided free of charge) and trained in the use of PPE, sharps injuries, dealing with contaminated equipment and dealing with any spillage of blood or body fluids and waste disposal. Health records should be kept for these employees.

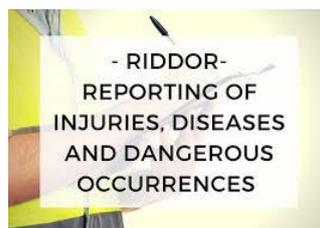
Vaccination Requirements for Dental Staff

Vaccination plays a crucial role in protecting dental healthcare workers from occupational exposure to infectious diseases. All clinical staff should be fully immunised against hepatitis B, with antibody levels monitored to confirm an adequate response.

Annual influenza vaccination is recommended to reduce the risk of seasonal flu transmission within the dental setting.

Depending on individual risk assessments and national guidance, staff may also require vaccinations for measles, mumps, rubella (MMR), varicella (chickenpox), and tetanus. Employers have a responsibility under the Health and Safety at Work Act and COSHH to assess infection risks and facilitate access to appropriate vaccinations, while maintaining confidential health records. Ensuring dental staff are up to date with recommended immunisations protects both the team and patients, contributing to a safer clinical environment.¹⁰

Reporting Incidents (RIDDOR)



Under the requirements of the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR), the employer has legal duties to report certain incidents and dangerous occurrences to your relevant enforcing authority. Incidents such as a puncture wound from a needle known to contain blood contaminated with a BBV should be reported as a dangerous occurrence.¹¹

Conclusion

Health and Safety in dental practice is an extensive topic and further detailed articles can be found on the website including, Infection Prevention and Control articles, Waste

Management, Safer Sharps, Radiation Safety, The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health, Manual Handling, Blood Borne Viruses, First Aid, and The Role of the Fire Marshall.

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) expect dental practices to be able to demonstrate compliance with Health and Safety and the relevant legislation. They would expect a dental practice to be able to provide documented evidence of identifying, managing and mitigating risks to employees and patients.

The links provided below will also provide further information which may be useful to members of the team that act as the health and safety officer for the practice.

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Personal Development Plan and Reflective Learning

This CPD is linked to the following GDC Enhanced CPD Development Outcome:

B. Effective management of self, and effective management of others or effective work with others in the dental team, in the interests of patients at all times; providing constructive leadership where appropriate.

C. Maintenance and development of knowledge and skill within your field of practice.

Reflective learning is now a requirement of the GDC Enhanced Professional Development Scheme. As such, you will be given the option to answer some reflective learning questions, before your certificate is generated.

Please remember that you can choose if you wish to fill this in on completion of the exam, but you can also update this at any time from your CPD log. If you take a few moments to write your reflection on completion, you will have fulfilled the Enhanced CPD requirements.

Further reading

A Toolkit for Health and Safety at Work <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg344.pdf>

Health and Safety Executive <https://www.hse.gov.uk/>

Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 <http://www.hse.gov.uk/legislation/hswa.htm>

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