

TOOLBOX TALK

Hand arm vibration toolbox talk

About six minutes · Control of Vibration at Work Regulations 2005

SITE

DATE

GIVEN BY

WHY IT MATTERS

Over the ten years to 2024, 2,860 new cases of hand arm vibration syndrome were assessed for Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit in Great Britain, and HSE says the real number is higher because many people never claim. Construction is one of the industries where exposure is highest.

HAVS damages the nerves, blood vessels and joints of the hands. It starts with tingling at night and numb fingertips, and if the exposure carries on it can mean not being able to do up a button, pick up a screw or feel the cold. HSE is clear that it is preventable, and that once the damage is done it is permanent.

HSE, Hand arm vibration statistics in Great Britain (IIDB new assessments, 2015 to 2024)

THE POINTS TO MAKE

- ☐ **What vibration does to your hands**
Vibration from a tool goes into the hands and arms every second the trigger is pulled. Over months and years it damages the small nerves and blood vessels in the fingers. Some people show signs after a few months, others after a few years. Carry on with the same exposure and it gets worse, and it does not get better when the work stops.
- ☐ **The tools and the trigger times**
HSE gives a simple guide. Hammer action tools such as breakers, hammer drills and needle guns used for more than about 15 minutes a day, or some rotary tools such as grinders for more than about an hour, are likely to take someone over the action value. It is trigger time that counts, not time on site.
- ☐ **A different way first**
The best fix is not to hold the vibrating tool at all. A breaker on an excavator instead of a hand breaker. A diamond core drill instead of a hammer action bit for large holes. A different fixing that needs no drilling. If a hand tool is still needed, use the lowest vibration tool that does the job properly. An undersized tool takes longer and does more harm.
- ☐ **Shorter spells, warm hands**
Several short spells are better than one long one, so swap tasks within the team and break up the work. Keep warm and dry, because cold hands lose blood flow and make the damage worse. Gloves keep hands warm, but they do not protect against vibration. Store tools so the handles are not freezing when you pick them up. Smoking also cuts blood flow to the fingers.
- ☐ **The early signs**
Tingling or pins and needles in the fingers, often at night. Numb fingertips, or not being able to feel things properly. Losing grip strength. In the cold and wet, the tips of the fingers going white, then red and painful as they warm up. Any one of these is a reason to tell your supervisor or the person who does your health checks, now rather than later.
- ☐ **The two levels in the law**
The law sets two daily levels. At the exposure action value of 2.5 m/s² A(8), the employer must put a programme in place to cut exposure, and health checks start. The exposure limit value of 5 m/s² A(8) must not be exceeded at all. The vibration figure of each tool and the time it is used decide where you are.
- ☐ **Look after the tool**
Blunt chisels, worn bits, damaged discs and worn mounts all raise vibration and make the job take longer. Keep cutting edges sharp, change consumables when they wear, and report any tool that feels rougher than it should. Let the tool do the work. Gripping hard or forcing it pushes more vibration into your hands.

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TOOLBOX TALK, CONTINUED

Hand arm vibration toolbox talk: do, do not, and the questions

DO

- Ask whether the job can be done without a hand-held vibrating tool.
- Use the lowest vibration tool that is right for the job, and keep bits, chisels and discs sharp.
- Keep to the trigger times on the risk assessment and swap tasks to share the work.
- Keep your hands and body warm and dry, and massage your fingers in breaks.
- Report tingling, numbness or white fingers straight away, and report tools that feel rough.
- Go to your health checks when they are booked.

DO NOT

- Do not grip or force a tool harder than you need to. Let the tool do the work.
- Do not use blunt bits, worn chisels or damaged discs.
- Do not rely on gloves to stop vibration. They keep hands warm and that is all.
- Do not run one person on a breaker all day when the work can be shared.
- Do not keep quiet about symptoms. Early reporting is what stops it getting worse.

ASK THE TEAM

- ? Which tools on this job vibrate the most, and how long does each of us use them in a day?
- ? Is there a way to do this task without a hand-held breaker or hammer drill?
- ? Has anyone had tingling, numbness or white fingers after work or at night?
- ? Which tools need a new bit, chisel or disc, or feel rougher than they should?
- ? How do we keep hands warm and dry on this site, especially first thing in the morning?

TO CLOSE

Hand arm vibration does its damage quietly, a little every day, and by the time fingers go white in the cold it has been going on for a while. It is preventable and it is permanent, so the work happens now, before the symptoms. Find a way to do the job without the vibrating tool if you can, use the right tool when you cannot, keep it sharp, share the work and keep your hands warm. And tell us the first time your fingers tingle.

Record it. Who gave the talk, where, when, who was there and what was raised. The last page is the record.

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ATTENDANCE RECORD

Hand arm vibration toolbox talk: given and understood

Each person signs on the day to say they were present and understood the talk. Anyone who joins the team later is given the talk before starting, and signs here.

SITE	DATE	TIME	GIVEN BY
NAME	COMPANY	TRADE OR ROLE	SIGNATURE

QUESTIONS RAISED, AND THE ANSWERS GIVEN	ACTIONS AGREED, WHO AND BY WHEN	
TALK GIVEN BY (SIGNATURE)	POSITION	DATE

MANAGEMENT OF HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK REGULATIONS 1999, REGULATION 10: INFORMATION FOR EMPLOYEES