

Safety FOCUSED

April 2015

Manual Handling in the Workplace

The risks of manual handling are common but easily managed. Find out how.

Battling Workplace Germs

Avoid getting sick this spring by practising good workplace hygiene.



A monthly safety newsletter from

Manual Handling in the Workplace

Manual handling—using bodily force to move a load by lifting, lowering, carrying, pushing or pulling—is conducted throughout many workplaces across the United Kingdom. Although the activity is so common, many workers suffer undue injuries due to improper manual handling.

The risks of manual handling are more complicated than just transporting a large, heavy item. You can inadvertently injure yourself even with a very light item, depending on the number of times you have to pick it up or carry it, the distance you move it, the height from which you pick it up or set it down, and any twisting, bending, stretching or other awkward postures you assume while handling it.

Manual handling injuries are indiscriminate—they can affect workers across all occupations. Manual handling is one of the most common causes of workplace injuries, and these types of injuries can occur anywhere, anytime. Heavy manual labour, awkward postures and previous or existing injuries may increase these risks.

Injuries from improper manual handling also tend to negatively affect injured workers' personal lives. Their injuries can make it difficult to sleep, engage in leisure activities, find future job prospects and may lead to long-term health

problems. A single manual handling mishap can cause or agitate a recurring injury.

Follow these simple tips to reduce your risk of suffering a manual handling injury in the workplace:

- Think before lifting or handling items.
- Adopt a stable position.
- Get a good grip on the object.
- Start in a good posture—avoid stooping or squatting.
- Do not flex your back any further than normal while lifting.
- Keep the load close to your waist.
- Avoid twisting your back or leaning sideways.
- Keep your head up when handling.
- Move the load smoothly.
- Do not handle more than you can manage.
- Put the load down before adjusting it.

The risks of manual handling are more complicated than just transporting a large, heavy item. You can inadvertently injure yourself even when moving something very light.



Battling Workplace Germs

When the season changes from winter to spring, many individuals find themselves battling illness—whether it is from a lack of vitamin D after a long winter hibernation or their immune systems just are not up to par yet, GPs see an increase in respiratory illness around this time of year. At the workplace, this can spell trouble for a sick person's co-workers, unless office hygiene is kept top of mind.

The typical employee's workspace has more bacteria per square centimetre than an office toilet seat. Door handles, shared kitchen appliances, desks, phones and other private surfaces are also prime habitats for the viruses and bacteria that cause colds, the flu, strep throat, pneumonia and other illnesses.

Even if you keep your personal workspace tidy, it may not be clean. Unlike toilets—which tend to be cleaned regularly—keyboards, phone receivers, desks, and sometimes office and kitchen countertops are rarely cleaned. Consider this: Crumbs and coffee spills are capable of supporting mini eco-systems. Without a cleaning,

even a small area on your desk or phone can sustain millions of bacteria that could potentially cause illness. The good news: Heightened awareness and hygiene efforts can go help keep your workplace clean. Remember the following points and share them with your co-workers:

- Germ-busting at the workplace is a team effort. It only takes one person to infect everyone.
- Regular cleaning of personal workspaces kills bacteria and stops the spread of germs.
- Frequent cleaning of shared workspaces is essential to maintaining sanitary safety. Disinfection is the goal, so be sure to use a true disinfectant, not just an anti-bacterial product. Daily disinfection reduces bacteria levels by 99 per cent.
- Be considerate of others and cough or sneeze into tissues, your sleeve or the crook of your arm. Wash your hands often and sanitise using alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel. Consider having these in any common areas, including kitchens and toilets.



Safety in NUMBERS ¹₂³

Manual handling injuries account for about **twenty-five per cent** of all reported UK workplace injuries, according to the Health and Safety Executive.

Real-life Case Study

A warehouse worker in Manchester started to suffer from severe back pain. After seeing his GP, he was told that his pain was the result of repetitive, heavy lifting at his job. His work involved stooping, twisting and holding loads away from his body all day long.

The severity of his back pain forced the worker to stay home for eight weeks. He was unable to enjoy his usual leisure activities and was worried that he would not be able to return to his normal job, for fear of reinjuring himself.

During the worker's absence, his company installed a hoist that improved the company's workflow and greatly reduced the manual handling demands of the workers. Along with a sensible plan to manage his back pain, the hoist contributed to the worker's full recovery and helped prevent a recurrence of the injury.