

Advice for employees attending for health surveillance

The Occupational Health Unit (OHU) provides health surveillance for university staff who are exposed to hazards whilst at work; noise, fumes, chemicals, dust, vibration for example. Your employer has a duty of care to you and in order to check that the hazards are not affecting your health, and that the safeguards in place are working correctly they are required under law to provide health surveillance.

The laws:

Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999

Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations 2002

The Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005

The Control of Vibration at Work Regulations 2005

FAQs

Why do I need health surveillance?

If you are working with tools, or in an area where you are exposed to any hazardous materials, noise or vibration your employer has to provide appropriate health surveillance, this is a legal requirement, and is based on the assessment of risk, and what health surveillance you require depends on the job you do and the tools, and/or hazards you are exposed to.

Can I opt out of attending for health surveillance?

If you are working in an area, or with tools, which are covered by the laws outlined above, then you are required to attend for health surveillance; attendance is mandatory, not voluntary, and you cannot opt out.

What will happen when I arrive for my appointment?

The Occupational Health adviser will introduce him or herself to you and request that you complete a questionnaire. The questions are about; lungs, hearing, skin and vibration, and depend on your answering them honestly. If you have any problem with this form, the adviser will be happy to help you, just ask.

Once you have completed the questionnaire, the adviser will go over it with you and may ask a few more questions depending on the responses you have put on your questionnaire. The adviser will only ask questions related to the questionnaire, usually to clarify something.

What tests will I have to do?

Depending on what risk you are exposed to, the health surveillance will involve what is appropriate for you.

Either:

Audiometric (Hearing) Testing: first of all the adviser will examine your ears with an otoscope, this is a torch which allows her to look in your ear to see if there are any external problems (you may have this done by your GP or practice nurse). If you have a build up of wax for example this may impact on the results of your hearing test. If you do have a lot of wax or a heavy cold or sinusitis you may be asked to come back at a later date, as the results of the test will not be accurate. Assuming all of this is satisfactory, then the adviser will explain the test to you. You will be seated facing away from the adviser, and be given a response button, which you must press and let go as soon as you hear a noise. You will have a set of headphones put on, and sounds will be presented to you through them, one ear at a time. The whole test takes about 10 minutes. If your test results are abnormal, you will be issued with a letter and a copy of your test results to hand into your GP, in order that (s)he can organise further testing or specialist referral.

It would be helpful if you would bring your hearing protection with you to this appointment,

Spirometry (lung function) Testing: this test requires you to blow into a cardboard tube, the first breath is to get an approximate measurement of the size of your lungs, the next 3 are to see how well your lungs are working, if you are asthmatic, some parts of this test will be familiar to you, as they are similar to peak flow testing. The adviser will demonstrate exactly what you are to do before you start the test, so don't worry.

If you have inhalers it would be helpful if you would bring them to this appointment.

Vibration surveillance: is carried out over a number of stages, but initially involves answering a questionnaire and any other questions the adviser thinks are appropriate. If there is anything that requires further checking an appointment will be arranged for you to be seen by the Occupational Health Physician (OHP). If this happens the adviser will explain what the next stage entails.

Skin surveillance: again involves answering a questionnaire. If there is anything of concern the adviser will refer you to our OH Physician for further advice and recommendations.

Results: following the completion of your health surveillance the results will be explained to you. Any relevant advice regarding the hazards and risks that you may be exposed to will also be issued at this time.

Health surveillance is carried out at specific intervals:

All - pre-employment/pre-placement

Lung function (& skin) – 6 weeks after employment, 12 weeks after employment, 6 months after employment, 12 months after employment and annually thereafter.

Hearing – 6 months after employment, 12 months after employment, 1 year after this, and if no significant change 3 years after this.

Vibration - 6 months after employment, 12 months after employment and annually thereafter.

If you have been in post but have not previously undergone health surveillance, you will be assessed for 2 consecutive years, and then reviewed as required by the appropriate regulations.

If you are leaving the department to go to a post where you are no longer going to be exposed to any of these hazards, or you are retiring, occupational health should be informed in order to do a "leavers" medical.

Who will see my Occupational Health records?

The standards of confidentiality for records held by your general practitioner or any hospital specialist you may have seen also apply to occupational health records. Consequently, neither your manager nor HR staff has access to your records. Details of your attendance at occupational health and the health surveillance carried out will be returned to your line manager as this is required to show that appropriate health surveillance has been carried out. This information does not include test results, it shows only that you have attended and undergone the appropriate health surveillance. After you have been shown the test results, you will be asked to sign a form indicating that you have attended. If referral, or another appointment is required either with the adviser or with the OHP, this will be indicated, no confidential medical information will be enclosed. However, if recommendations are required, (e.g. the issue of new ear defenders) this will be indicated on the form in order that your manager can act on these recommendations.

Can I have a copy of the Fit form/letter from Occupational Health to my manager?

A photocopy of this can be given to you if you wish on the day. If you are referred, or if a further appointment is arranged with our OHP, please ask him when you attend for a copy of his letter to your manager.

[top](#) | [search](#) | [home](#)

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