TOOLBOX TALK · HEALTH & SAFETY

Hand-Arm Vibration: *The Damage You Can't Undo*

Control of Vibration at Work Regulations 2005: exposure action and limit values, health surveillance, trigger times and your right to protection.

Last reviewed: August 2026 HSE · Vibration at Work Regs 2005 England, Scotland and Wales ukworkrights.co.uk

In Northern Ireland, similar duties come from Northern Ireland's own health and safety law. Contact HSENI (Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland), not the HSE.

THE RISK

Why hand-arm vibration matters

- Hand-arm vibration syndrome (HAVS) is **permanent and cannot be reversed** once nerve and blood vessel damage sets in
- Early signs are **tingling, numbness and loss of grip**, often noticed first at night or in the cold
- Advanced HAVS causes **vibration white finger**, where fingers blanch and become painful on exposure to cold
- It can end a trade career, people lose the ability to hold small objects, fasten buttons or work safely at height
- Carpal tunnel syndrome is also a recognised consequence of vibration exposure
- Regularly affected tools: **breakers, grinders, sanders, chainsaws, needle guns, impact wrenches and plate compactors**
- HAVS is a **reportable disease under RIDDOR** when diagnosed and linked to work

IT IS THE TRIGGER TIME THAT COUNTS

Exposure is measured by how long the tool is actually cutting, breaking or grinding, not by shift length. A high-vibration breaker can reach the daily limit in well under an hour.

THE LEGAL LIMITS

Exposure action and limit values

- The **exposure action value (EAV)** is 2.5 m/s² A(8) averaged over eight hours, at this point your employer must act to reduce exposure and provide health surveillance
- The **exposure limit value (ELV)** is 5 m/s² A(8). This must not be exceeded, full stop
- Employers must **assess** the vibration risk, not guess it, using tool data and realistic trigger times
- Where the EAV is reached, employers must **reduce exposure to as low as reasonably practicable** and put a programme of controls in place
- Health surveillance is **legally required** above the EAV, and must be provided free and in working time
- Controls include **lower-vibration tools, job rotation, better cutting kit, and shorter trigger times**. Gloves are not a reliable control

ANTI-VIBRATION GLOVES ARE NOT THE ANSWER

HSE is clear that gloves cannot be relied on to reduce vibration exposure. They keep hands warm, which helps symptoms, but they do not bring you back under the limit.

YOUR RIGHTS

What you're entitled to

- **Health surveillance free of charge** if you are regularly exposed above the action value, usually a questionnaire, then assessment by a qualified person
- To be **told the results** of your own health surveillance
- To have your exposure **reduced** if HAVS is detected. That may mean different tools or different work
- **Information and training** on the risk, the symptoms and how to reduce exposure
- Protection from **detriment or dismissal** for raising a health and safety concern (Employment Rights Act 1996 s.44 and s.100)
- If you have been diagnosed, you may be able to claim **Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit**, and a civil claim may be possible

REPORT SYMPTOMS EARLY

HAVS caught at an early stage can often be stopped from getting worse by changing the work. Left unreported, it progresses. Telling someone is not making a fuss. It is the only thing that works.

COMMON QUESTIONS

Frequently asked questions

Q Can I claim compensation for HAVS?

Potentially. If your employer failed to assess or control vibration exposure and you have been diagnosed with HAVS or carpal tunnel syndrome, a personal injury claim may be possible. Time limits generally run three years from the date you knew your condition was work-related. Speak to a solicitor who handles occupational disease.

Q Do anti-vibration gloves keep me under the limit?

No. HSE guidance is explicit that gloves cannot be relied on to reduce vibration exposure to acceptable levels. They help keep hands warm, which eases symptoms, but the control has to come from the tool, the method or the trigger time.

Q What if my employer won't provide health surveillance?

Health surveillance is a legal requirement above the exposure action value, not an optional benefit. Raise it in writing first. If nothing changes, HSE can be contacted on 0300 003 1647, and you are protected from detriment for raising it.

FOR WHOEVER RUNS THIS TALK

Delivery notes & attendance record

Before you start

Ask who used a breaker, grinder or sander today and for how long. HAVS is measured in trigger time, actual tool-on-work time, not how long the shift was. Most people massively overestimate how much they can safely use a tool for.

Questions to ask the team

1. Which tools do you use that vibrate, and roughly how long is the trigger actually pulled?
2. Has anyone noticed tingling, numbness or fingers going white in the cold?
3. Do you know the vibration rating of the tools you use?
4. Could a lower-vibration tool or a different method do the same job?

The law behind this talk

Control of Vibration at Work Regulations 2005 (regs. 5, 6 and 7: assessment, control and health surveillance); Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 s.2(2)(c)

Employers must give workers comprehensible information, instruction and training on the risks they face, Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 s.2(2)(c) and Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 reg. 10. Keep the record below as evidence that you did.

Attendance record

Topic	Hand-Arm Vibration: The Damage You Can't Undo
Date	
Site / location	
Delivered by	
Actions agreed	
Next talk due	

Attendees

Name	Signature

Use the Print handout button to print this record. General information only, not legal advice. This toolbox talk is generic material and is not a substitute for a suitable and sufficient risk assessment by a competent person. Employers remain responsible for their duties under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

FREE H&S GUIDES

Hand-Arm Vibration *free guide*

Get plain-English information on your rights and your employer's legal duties.

HSE INFOLINE
0300 003 1647
hse.gov.uk

ACAS
0300 123 1100
acas.org.uk

CITIZENS ADVICE (ENGLAND)
0800 144 8848
citizensadvice.org.uk

CITIZENS ADVICE (WALES)
0800 702 2020
citizensadvice.org.uk

CITIZENS ADVICE SCOTLAND
0800 028 1456
cas.org.uk

UK WORK RIGHTS
Hand-Arm Vibration
ukworkrights.co.uk/toolbox-havs.html

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OTHER WAYS TO GET HELP

Ways to contact Acas

- Helpline: 0300 123 1100, Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm.
- Another language: call the helpline and ask for an interpreter. Acas says it can provide one straight away.
- Welsh: Acas can provide its services in Welsh if you ask.
- Cannot hear or speak on the phone: Relay UK, 18001 0300 123 1100, on the Relay UK app or a textphone. You type what you want to say and get text replies from the adviser.
- British Sign Language (BSL): call the helpline through the InterpretersLive! video relay service, in your browser or on the InterpretersLive! app. The interpreter calls Acas and translates between you and the adviser.
- If you cannot call the helpline (for example, you find it hard to speak on the phone, you are not in the UK, or you don't have enough phone credit), use the Acas accessibility form to ask for advice another way. Acas usually replies by email within 10 working days, by BSL or lip reading video call within 2 working days, or by phone within 5 working days. Acas reviews these requests Tuesday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.
- Early conciliation: if your case is already in conciliation, contact your conciliator. Their details are in your "Introducing Your Conciliator" email.
- Training, mediation support, collective conciliation or arbitration (not advice): Acas Training and Customer Services, 0300 123 1150, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, or email events@acas.org.uk. Relay UK: 18001 0300 123 1150. You can ask for an interpreter or call through InterpretersLive!. To book a BSL interpreter in advance for any Acas service, email events@acas.org.uk or call 0300 123 1150.

OTHER WAYS TO GET HELP

Ways to contact Citizens Advice in England

- Adviceline: 0800 144 8848. Usually open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, not on public holidays. Free from mobiles and landlines. At busy times you might wait up to an hour. If you call from a mobile you'll be asked for your postcode.
- Cannot hear or speak on the phone: Relay UK. Dial 18001 then 0800 144 8848, using the app or a textphone. There's no extra charge.
- Money or debt: debt helpline 0800 240 4420, Monday to Friday 9am to 8pm, Saturday 9.30am to 1pm, not on public holidays. Relay UK: 18001 then 0800 240 4420.
- Online chat with an adviser: debt problems (Monday to Friday 9am to 8pm, Saturday 9.30am to 1pm); claiming Universal Credit (Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm); energy bills or supply, consumer problems, or any other problem (Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm).
- Your local Citizens Advice: search by postcode or town on the Citizens Advice website. Most can only help if you live or work in their area.

OTHER WAYS TO GET HELP

Ways to contact Citizens Advice in Wales

- Advicelink: 0800 702 2020. Monday to Friday 8am to 7pm, Saturday 9am to 1pm, not on public holidays. Free from mobiles and landlines. At busy times you might wait up to an hour.
- Cannot hear or speak on the phone: Relay UK. Dial 18001 then 0800 702 2020, using the app or a textphone. There's no extra charge.
- Online chat with an adviser: usually Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.
- Your local Citizens Advice: search by postcode or town on the Citizens Advice website.

OTHER WAYS TO GET HELP

Ways to contact Citizens Advice in Scotland

- Free phone line to your local bureau: 0800 028 1456. Say the first part of your postcode and you'll be put through.
- British Sign Language (BSL): make a free BSL call to an adviser through the Contact Scotland BSL website or app (video relay interpreting on a computer, tablet or mobile). Contact Scotland BSL is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- Language or access needs: tell the bureau and they'll do their best to meet them.
- Applying for Universal Credit for the first time: Help to Claim helpline 0800 023 2581, Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm, or webchat on the Citizens Advice Scotland website. There's also a BSL service for Universal Credit applications.
- Defined contribution pensions (aged 50 or over): Pension Wise, 0800 138 3944, or +44 20 3733 3495 from outside the UK.
- NHS complaints in Scotland: Patient Advice and Support Service (PASS), 0800 917 2127, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.
- Gambling Support Service advice line: 0800 328 1131, Monday to Friday, 10am to 3pm.
- Your local bureau: find its contact details and opening times by postcode on the Citizens Advice Scotland website.
- If you cannot hear or speak on the phone, you can use Relay UK to make the call by typing. Use the free Relay UK app, or a textphone: dial 18001 first, then the number.

OTHER WAYS TO GET HELP

Ways to contact HSE

- Tell HSE about a health and safety issue: use the online form, or call 0300 003 1647 and HSE will fill it in for you. Building safety (Building Safety Regulator): 0300 790 6787.
- Ask HSE about health and safety, or reach a named person at HSE: use the online form, or call 0300 003 1747.
- Both lines: Monday and Tuesday 8.30am to 5pm, Wednesday 10am to 5pm, Thursday and Friday 8.30am to 5pm.
- Fatal and major injuries only: Incident Contact Centre, 0345 300 9923, Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 5pm. Report everything else online.
- Out of hours, only after a work-related death, a serious incident with several casualties, or one causing major disruption: duty officer, 0151 922 9235.
- Cannot hear or speak on the phone: HSE says it provides a text relay service for people who are D/deaf, hard of hearing or have a speech impairment.
- If you cannot hear or speak on the phone, you can use Relay UK to make the call by typing. Use the free Relay UK app, or a textphone: dial 18001 first, then the number.
- Website information in another format (accessible PDF, large print, easy read, audio or braille): use HSE's online contact form. HSE replies within 21 days.
- Other languages: HSE publishes translated information in many languages (hse.gov.uk/languages).

KEEP GOING

More free *toolbox talks*

TOOLBOX TALK

Noise at Work

ukworkrights.co.uk/toolbox-noise.html

TOOLBOX TALK

PPE

ukworkrights.co.uk/toolbox-ppe.html

TOOLBOX TALK

Machinery Guarding & Isolation

ukworkrights.co.uk/toolbox-machinery.html

FREE GUIDE

Health and safety at work

ukworkrights.co.uk/guide-health-safety.html