

November 2022

What to know about exposure monitoring and health monitoring – for small businesses

Your workers' health is important. Monitoring can be used to effectively manage health risks to your workers that arise from your work.

When do you need to monitor?

Working in hazardous conditions can adversely affect workers' health – in both the short (acute) and long term (chronic). This includes when the work involves substances that are harmful to people's health (substances hazardous to health).

You must ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of workers, and that other people are not put at risk by your work. In some circumstances, this could mean monitoring worker exposure and/or the health of workers.

Exposure monitoring can be used to:

- identify, assess and confirm health risks
- identify where new control measures are needed
- monitor how well current control measures are performing, and
- identify when control measures need to be reviewed, updated or removed.

Health monitoring can be used to tell you if workers are experiencing health effects from potential exposures. Health monitoring can also confirm that control measures are preventing harm.

Figure 1 explains what exposure monitoring and health monitoring are.

The type of monitoring depends on the kind of work you do. You will need to talk to a suitably qualified and experienced health and safety professional to advise if monitoring is appropriate for you – and if so, what type and how often. You could need initial monitoring carried out, and then regular (ongoing) monitoring.

What is the difference between exposure monitoring and health monitoring?

EXPOSURE MONITORING

Exposure monitoring measures and evaluates what your workers are being exposed to while they are at work.

This can involve workers wearing a device while they work. Examples of personal exposure monitoring:

- measuring the level of noise workers are being exposed to
- measuring the amount of a substance hazardous to health that workers are being exposed to
- measuring the amount of vibration workers' arms, hands or whole body are being exposed to.

It should be carried out by suitably qualified, trained and experienced people who know how to carry out the monitoring you need (such as Occupational Hygienists).



Biological exposure monitoring is another type of exposure monitoring. It usually involves taking blood or urine samples to test for a substance (or a metabolite of a substance) workers are working with.

Blood or other invasive samples must be taken by a health practitioner such as an Occupational Health Nurse or phlebotomist (for blood).

A suitably qualified, trained and experienced person is needed to interpret the results.



HEALTH MONITORING

Health monitoring looks at whether a worker's health is being harmed because of what they are being exposed to while they are at work.

Examples:

- carrying out hearing tests to check for hearing loss from being exposed to noise
- checking for skin damage from being exposed to a substance hazardous to health
- checking for nerve, muscle or circulation damage from being exposed to vibration.

Well-being programmes, employment prescreening and fitness-to-work examinations are **not** health monitoring.

Monitoring should be carried out at the beginning of a worker's employment (to get baseline readings). Then regular (ongoing) monitoring should be carried out.

It should be carried out by suitably qualified, trained and experienced health practitioners with the knowledge, skills, training and experience to carry out the monitoring you need.

For example, an Occupational Health Nurse could carry out initial health assessment (health screening) and subsequent routine regular testing. If suspected, workers should be sent to a health practitioner who understands occupational health for a full medical assessment/formal diagnosis and feedback to the PCBU. This could be an Occupational Physician or GP with relevant experience.



FIGURE 1: Exposure monitoring and health monitoring

Monitoring is not a control measure. It does not replace the need for control measures to eliminate or minimise worker exposure to harm.

If you intend to carry out monitoring, what are some things to be aware of?

1 Get help from health and safety professionals with the knowledge, skills, training and experience for advice and to carry out the monitoring required including interpretation of results.

2 You should pay for monitoring costs.

3 You must work together with other businesses if you share monitoring duties.

At times, you and another business may need to monitor the same person's exposure or health (this could happen when you share a workplace or you are in a contracting chain). If this happens, talk with the other business and decide who will organise the monitoring, how information will be shared (see point 8), and how costs will be split.

4 You must engage with your workers and their representatives when making decisions about monitoring.

Provide information about the monitoring to workers in a way they can readily understand. Think about the best way to provide this information, and the best time to do it.

Listen to what your workers have to say, and tell them what you have decided to do in a timely manner.

Talk with your workers about what the monitoring will involve

For example, with your monitoring provider, discuss with your workers:

- what the monitoring will involve, when and where it will take place, and how often
- which workers will be involved
- how information and training about monitoring will be provided to workers
- what the monitoring reports will contain
- how monitoring results will be stored and shared
- what will happen if monitoring results show workers are being harmed or at risk.

5 Workers must give their written informed consent for biological exposure monitoring or health monitoring.

For more information see: www.hdc.org.nz

6 You should try to find a solution if workers do not want to take part in monitoring.

If a worker does not want to take part in monitoring, you should find out the reasons why. Work together with your workers to address their concerns.

However if the worker still does not want to take part in the monitoring, consider what next steps you could take to manage the health risks to that worker. For example, could the worker do different work that does not require monitoring? Is there a way to eliminate the risk so monitoring is not needed?

Refusal to participate may give rise to an employment dispute.

7 You must keep any personal information collected during monitoring secure and confidential.

You must comply with the [Privacy Act 2020](#) if you are collecting, storing, using or disclosing personal information (this is information about an identifiable person).

Any personal information must be stored securely, such as in a locked drawer or on a secure computer. Restrict access to authorised people only. Store information separately from your employee records.

8 You must take care when sharing monitoring results that contain personal information.

Offer the workers being monitored a copy of their monitoring results.

It is also important to report back to all workers about how well you are managing all your health risks. WorkSafe can also ask for monitoring results.

If the monitoring results contain personal information, you must comply with the [Privacy Act 2020 requirements](#) for disclosing personal information.

9 Use monitoring results to manage health risks.

Under the Privacy Act 2020, you must use any personal information you collect for the purposes it has been collected for. There are a few [exceptions](#) to this.

10 Take immediate action if the monitoring results show your workers are being harmed or at risk because of work.

Investigate, review your control measures and then decide what actions you will take to eliminate or minimise the health risks to your workers. Your monitoring provider and your workers may be able to help you with this.

If you are carrying out work that requires monitoring under Health and Safety at Work Regulations, you must meet those requirements.

For more information, see WorkSafe's guidance: [Exposure monitoring and health monitoring: Guidance for businesses](#)