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WorkSafe New Zealand advises spirometry testing resume in current COVID climate

WorkSafe recommends restarting spirometry tests for high-risk workers in current COVID-19 climate.

Background

In mid to late 2020 spirometry testing was suspended due to concerns over its potential links to the spread of COVID-19. Concerns were raised because spirometry testing creates exhaled aerosols.

While infection rates may continue to fluctuate and new or more virulent strains may appear WorkSafe recommends testing should resume – especially for high-risk activity workers.

This advice is subject to change as new variants emerge or the public health response to the virus is adjusted.

What's the issue?

Most occupational health providers (OHPs) have continued to assess workers through respiratory questionnaires and detailed health status interviews, including working with businesses to focus on high-risk workers.

However, for many businesses, no testing has been carried out on high-risk workers for at least two years.

Our advice

WorkSafe believes it is now appropriate to restart spirometry testing for pre-employment checks and exit medicals for workers doing high-risk activities, such as welders and those working with respirable crystalline silica.

This will require OHPs to take suitable risk assessment and control measures before resuming spirometry testing.

PCBU requirements

The business (with the consent of the worker) should provide information on workers identified as vulnerable.

Businesses should identify high-priority spirometry testing which relates to high-risk work.

OHPs and businesses must agree on the time needed to complete testing and how impacts on business will be managed.

A review of the spirometry testing process should be included as part of the reporting to the business.

More information

[Conducting spirometry in occupational health at COVID-19 times: international standards](#)

[Pulmonary Function Testing During SARS-CoV-2 Outbreaks](#)

[COVID-19 Infection Control Measures in Occupational Health Settings](#)