

# Fitness for Work and Occupational Health

## SSE Guidance

Fitness for Work is one of the tests that are carried out at SSE as part of our Occupational Health Surveillance programme for our at risk employees.

Health surveillance is a system of ongoing health checks. These health checks may be required by law for employees who are exposed to substances hazardous to health, or work in roles where they are exposed to other risks, such as noise, vibration, or dust.

**At SSE we carry out Health Surveillance on around 5000 employees. In SSE Networks we carry out Health Surveillance on just under 2,000 employees, and Fitness for Work checks on just under 500 employees. Fitness for work are additional checks on general health, weight, blood pressure and are carried out where employees have additional risk in their role, such as safety critical working at height, or high voltage live lines-people.**

**We regularly review the process of who is assessed, trends from the results and follow up all the open cases every month to track progress. Our central OH team work hand in hand with the Businesses and line managers to ensure that each employee is cared for.**

### What is health surveillance?

*Health surveillance* refers to specific circumstances where the health assessment of an employee is legally required in relation to health risks encountered in the workplace. Health Surveillance is defined in the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (MHSW 1999) and the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH).

There may also be a statutory requirement for Health Surveillance under other specific Health and Safety Regulations, including those related to work with noise and vibration.

There are no specific legal requirements for Health Surveillance for exposure to other health risks, such as manual handling, or work that might give rise to stress-related disorders. This is mainly because valid ways to detect ill health do not exist yet, or that the link between work (hazard) and ill health is uncertain.

Other types of health assessments take place in the workplace and should not be confused with Health Surveillance, e.g.:

- Health Promotion, Lifestyle/ Wellness activities and advice.
- Health Screening: e.g. blood pressure, glucose or cholesterol testing to screen for circulatory disease.

- Fitness-for-Work Assessments. Examples of fitness-for-work assessments include: forklift truck and other driver medicals; confined space medicals; off-shore medicals; and overseas travel medicals.

At SSE we have a Health Surveillance Risk Standard, which provides a framework to assist in the management of health surveillance.

Health surveillance helps to ensure that health risks are effectively managed by acting as a check on:

- how control measures are working; and
- helps to pinpoint where further steps need to be taken.



### When is Health Surveillance Required?

There is a legal requirement to conduct Health surveillance if:

- There is an identifiable disease or adverse health effects which may be related to exposure to a hazard in the workplace;
- There is a reasonable likelihood that the disease or effect may occur under particular conditions of work; and
- There are valid techniques for detecting the disease or effect at an early stage.

Common examples of Health Surveillance include:

- Skin Surveillance - examination by responsible person of the skin of hands of employees exposed to skin sensitising or irritant chemicals.
- Respiratory Surveillance - measurement of lung function in employees exposed to substances known to cause occupational asthma or rhinitis e.g. employees exposed to certain types of dust or chemicals.
- Hearing Surveillance - examination of ears and hearing of employees exposed to noise.
- HAVS Surveillance - examination of employees exposed to hand-arm transmitted vibration.
- Biological Effect Monitoring - testing blood or urine of employees for substances, or effects, caused by exposures in the workplace.

## What are the benefits of health surveillance?

*Health surveillance* can help employers to protect the health of their workforce in a number of ways:

- Protecting health of employees who are exposed to workplace hazards;
- Detection of adverse health effects at an early stage;
- Provide information to employers on the success, or otherwise of workplace control measures;
- Help identify areas where further action is required; and
- Improve feedback and communication with employees about health and safety risks and promote healthy behaviour, both within and outside the workplace.

From a personal point of view you will be assessed whether you are fit and healthy. If there is something wrong you can seek the appropriate treatment you need. It will also give you the opportunity to ask any questions you may have relating to your health.

## When is health surveillance required?

The key to determining when Health Surveillance is required is a Risk Assessment. Through the risk assessment process health hazards in the workplace are determined, those at risk identified and measures taken to control the risk. Where risks remain, further steps need to be taken, one of which is to consider whether Health Surveillance is necessary, using the guidance available from the SSE OH team, and associated documentation.

It is important to remember that Health Surveillance must not be a substitute for controlling health risks at work: for example, a programme of hearing testing will not stop employees developing noise-induced hearing loss from uncontrolled exposure to noise.

Managers should ask themselves the following questions:

- Is there a hazard to health?
- Is there a significant risk of disease or adverse health effects occurring under the circumstances of exposure?
- Is there a requirement for Health Surveillance under specific Health and Safety regulations; such as noise and vibration regulations?

## Who undertakes Health Surveillance?

If a requirement for Health Surveillance is identified it is likely that assessments will need to be undertaken by experienced occupational health professionals.

At basic level Health Surveillance can involve employees themselves checking for signs of skin rashes or symptoms; provided they have been carefully instructed in knowing what to look out for and that self-reporting is linked to the *Health Surveillance* programme. An example would be employees noticing soreness, redness and itching on their hands and arms, where they work with substances that can irritate or damage the skin.



In some circumstances trained supervisors (responsible person) can undertake Health Surveillance; for example checking employees' skin for rashes and inflammation, or asking questions about hand symptoms where work involves exposure to hand-transmitted vibration.

For more complicated assessments, an occupational health adviser (OHA) can ask about symptoms or carry out an examination. For certain hazards, clinical examinations may need to be carried out by an occupational health physician.

## Who holds my health records?

Where any health information is written down, such as lung function test reports, records have to be kept for a long time, typically 40 years. This is because the health effects that might arise from exposure could take several years to be fully established.

Records are kept by the Occupational Health provider and employees have a right of access to their own health record.

## Who will see my Occupational Health records?

The standards of confidentiality for records held by your doctor or any hospital specialist you may have seen also apply to occupational health records.

Details of your attendance at occupational health screening 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.

If referral, or another appointment is required either with the nurse or OH physician, this will be indicated, no confidential medical information will be enclosed. However, if a medical condition is found to affect your ability to work the OH practitioner has a legal obligation to inform SSE to ensure that you and your colleagues are safe at work.

### Who can I contact for further information?

- the Occupational Health Team –
- Ask HR
- SHE Business Manager
- Online interactive Health and Wellbeing Portal

### References

**Key references required to develop Business risk control systems and procedures.**

SSE	Health Surveillance Standard
HSE Books	Control of substances hazardous to health
HSE Web	Health and safety at work made simple
HSE Books	Controlling noise at work.
HSE Books	Hand arm vibration.
HSE Books	Whole body vibration
HSE Books	Understanding health surveillance at work
DVLA	Guide to medical standards of fitness to drive.
HSE Web	Health Surveillance at work HSE webpage