



Occupational Health Service

Occupational asthma

This leaflet gives you practical information about occupational asthma. You may meet substances within the Trust which could cause allergies if you breathe them in. If this happens, further exposure, sometimes even in small quantities, may result in allergic symptoms such as:

- Wheezing
- Tightness of chest
- Breathlessness
- Coughing
- Runny and itchy eyes (conjunctivitis)
- Runny nose and sneezing (rhinitis)

Most cases of sensitisation occur during the first two years of exposure, often in the first few months, but sometimes they may only appear after many years of exposure. Symptoms are sometimes most severe in the evening or during the night and you may not associate them with work. However, improvement in symptoms during weekends and holidays often points to an occupational cause. Symptoms can become permanent if you continue to be exposed to substances causing irritation.

What sort of substances cause asthma symptoms

A wide variety of substances can cause these symptoms if you breathe them in.

However, you should be especially vigilant if you work with:

- Latex (natural rubber gloves, some catheters, sticking plasters etc.)
- Sterilising solutions
- Formaldehyde (a preservative for specimens)
- Wood dusts
- Flour/grain dust
- Methylmethacrylate (bone cement)
- Soldering flux (multi-core solders)
- Isocyanates (some lightweight plasters)
- Cleaning agents

- Some agars and enzymes
- Animals (in some areas of research)

If you work with any of these substances, and visit your doctor with the symptoms previously listed in this leaflet then, it is important that you tell your doctor about the agents that you work with and also report this to Occupational Health.

What can you do?

You should complete your annual respiratory questionnaire when required and attend your lung function test when invited as well. If identified as working in a role where you require this health surveillance, it is a legal requirement that you attend. Please note: Any non-attendance of appointments/screening questionnaires may lead to a restriction of duties.

Your lung function test

The lung function test, in conjunction with a health questionnaire, is designed specifically to identify symptoms of occupational asthma and enable an informed decision to be made about whether any breathing difficulties you are experiencing are likely to be related to your work. Occasionally our occupational health doctor may wish to see you if you have symptoms or a reduced test result. The results of the lung function test give accurate values of the function of your lungs. By comparing values against previous results, and 'normal ranges', any deficiency or deterioration can be identified.

Overall result:

If your overall result is shown as referred, your results will be shown to a doctor for assessment and you may be asked to attend another appointment. You will be given a copy of your results, and with your permission, a copy will be sent to your GP.

Name	Date	
	Actual	% of predicted
FVC:	litres	%
FEV:	litres	%
FEV1/FVC:	%	
Overall result: Acceptable / Referred		

Feedback

We are keen to hear your comments and ideas about improving the service. Please email the department with any comments.

If you have any concerns or feedback please email the Occupational Health Service via:

✉ OHEnquiries@uhb.nhs.uk

Reference: Health and Safety Executive (2012):
Breathe Freely 172L

How to refer

To request any of the services offered by Occupational Health or to find out more, please contact your local hospital below;

Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham (Heritage Building)

3rd Floor North Block (South Corridor),
Mindelsohn Way, Birmingham, B15 2TH

Tel: 0121 371 7170

Email: OHEnquiries@uhb.nhs.uk

Heartlands Hospital

Stratford House, Bordesley Green Road,
Birmingham, B9 5SS

Tel: 0121 424 3004

Email: OHEnquiries@uhb.nhs.uk

Good Hope Hospital

23 Bedford Road, Sutton Coldfield,
West Midlands, B75 6BE

Tel: 0121 424 3004

Email: OHEnquiries@uhb.nhs.uk

Solihull Hospital

Lode Lane, Solihull, B91 2JL

Tel: 0121 424 3004

Email: OHEnquiries@uhb.nhs.uk