

# CARING FOR THOSE WHO CARE

Guide for the development and implementation of occupational health and safety programmes for health workers

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



# OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY FOR HEALTH WORKERS

All health workers have one main aim – to improve people’s health. While contributing to the enjoyment of the right to health for all, health workers should also enjoy the right to healthy and safe working conditions to maintain their own health.

Health workers face a range of occupational risks associated with infections, unsafe patient handling, hazardous chemicals, radiation, heat and noise, psychosocial hazards, violence and harassment, injuries, inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene.

The protection of health and safety of health workers should be part of the core business of the health sector: to protect and restore health without causing harm to patients and workers.

Comprehensive and gender-responsive programmes for managing occupational health and safety for health workers at national, subnational and health facility levels can prevent diseases and injuries caused by work, while improving the quality and safety of care, human resources for health and environmental sustainability in the health sector.

## WHAT IS OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY?



**Occupational health and safety is a multidisciplinary area of work aiming at:**

- ✓ promotion and maintenance of the highest degree of physical, mental and social well-being of workers in all occupations;
- ✓ prevention among workers of departures from health caused by their working conditions;
- ✓ protection of workers in their employment from risks resulting from factors adverse to health; and

- ✓ placing and maintenance of workers in an occupational environment adapted to their physiological and psychological capabilities.

The science and practice of occupational health and safety involves several disciplines, including occupational medicine, nursing, ergonomics, psychology, hygiene, safety engineering among others.



Credit: WHO/Bink Media - Hannah Reyes Morales

## WHO ARE THE HEALTH WORKERS?



All people engaged in work actions whose primary intent is to improve health. This includes health service providers, such as doctors, nurses, midwives, public health professionals, laboratory technicians, health technicians, medical and non-medical technicians, personal care workers, community health workers, healers and traditional medicine practitioners.

The term also includes health management and support workers such as cleaners, drivers, hospital administrators, district health managers and social workers, and other occupational groups in health-related activities as defined by the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08).

# WHAT ARE PROGRAMMES FOR OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY FOR HEALTH WORKERS?



**Sets of planned and coordinated activities at national, subnational and health facility levels that include governance, regulations and standards, human resources, financing and services aimed at:**

- ✓ preventing diseases and injuries arising out of, linked with or occurring in the course of work;
- ✓ building healthier and safer working environment; and
- ✓ promoting health and well-being of health workers.

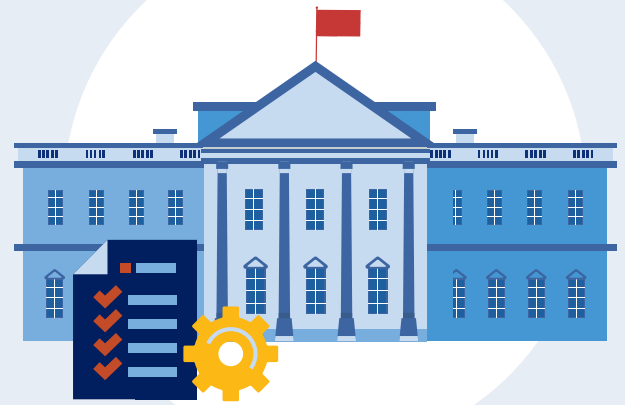
**Programmes for occupational health and safety for health workers are based on the following principles:**

- ✓ Employers of health workers have the duty to implement occupational health and safety measures, while health workers have the right to healthy and safe working conditions, a duty to comply with the instructions for health and safety and to take reasonable care of their own safety.
- ✓ Occupational health and safety measures require a system for management, continuous improvement and regular dialogue between employers, workers and their representatives, as well as involvement of other stakeholders.

- ✓ Efficiency can be increased by establishing synergies between programmes targeting health workers and health facilities, such as programmes on the quality and safety of care, health workforce management and environmental health.
- ✓ The aim should be to cover all health workers in all types of health facilities and that programmes are implemented in sustainable ways to ensure continuous protection of the health and safety of health workers at all times.
- ✓ Development and implementation of the programmes should be gender-responsive, non-discriminatory and inclusive, taking into account the special needs of female health workers, migrant health workers, vulnerable groups and workers with precarious employment conditions.



# WHAT ARE KEY ELEMENTS OF NATIONAL PROGRAMMES?



## The key elements of a national programme for occupational health and safety of health workers include the following:

- ✓ National policy statement on occupational health and safety for health workers issued at the highest possible level and communicated at all workplace levels, and in all management and practice environments in the health sector.
- ✓ A unit or person in charge of occupational health and safety of health workers designated within the ministry of health.
- ✓ A multistakeholder Steering Committee for health and safety in the health sector, involving employers' and workers' representatives, established at the national level to oversee and steer programme implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- ✓ Regulations and standards for prevention and control of occupational health hazards in the health sector available in all health facilities.
- ✓ A set of objectives, targets and key indicators for monitoring and evaluation of programme implementation at the national, subnational and facility levels available and integrated into the national health information system.
- ✓ Established mechanisms for efficient financing of measures for the health and safety of health workers.
- ✓ Adequate human resources for occupational health and safety for health workers in sufficient numbers, and technical knowledge and skills available at all levels of health systems.
- ✓ Adequate supplies and commodities including personal protective equipment, vaccines, safe medical devices, equipment and tools for safe work readily available at all levels of the health system.
- ✓ Standards for the provision of occupational health services for health workers available, along with a system for quality assurance and a programme for their expansion.
- ✓ Policies for the provision of support services for health workers addressing human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), tuberculosis (TB) and hepatitis B and C services for health workers.

# WHAT ARE KEY DELIVERABLES OF A FACILITY PROGRAMME?



## The key deliverables of a programme for occupational health and safety in a health facility include the following:

- ✓ A written facility occupational health and safety policy available in all health facilities.
- ✓ Focal points for occupational health and safety designated and trained in all health facilities.
- ✓ Joint labour-management committees for health and safety, as required by national regulations, appointed, meet regularly with meetings documented.
- ✓ A regular training programme and safety briefing plan for all health workers and specific target groups that is designed, planned and implemented.
- ✓ Risk assessments, prevention and mitigation of occupational hazards that are regularly carried out and documented.
- ✓ Action plans for work improvement that are developed, implemented, monitored and evaluated, in collaboration with safety and health committees and/or workers' representatives.
- ✓ A policy for the necessary vaccination of health workers, according to the national immunization policy and the specific occupational health hazards.
- ✓ Immunization against vaccine-preventable diseases that is provided at no cost to health workers, ensuring that all required doses of immunizations have been received by all workers at risk, including cleaners and waste handlers.
- ✓ Standard operating procedures for reporting accidental exposures to occupational hazards and incidents, while eliminating barriers to reporting and providing a blame-free environment.
- ✓ Arrangements for recording and notification of occupational accidents, occupational diseases and, as appropriate, dangerous occurrences, commuting accidents and suspected cases of occupational diseases.
- ✓ Services for early detection, diagnosis, treatment, care, notification and support for occupational diseases and injuries, including occupational infections – such as HIV, hepatitis B and C, TB, COVID-19 – provided at no cost to workers while also maintaining confidentiality.
- ✓ A set of indicators and a system for regular collection, tracking, analysis, reporting and acting upon disaggregated data to promote the health and safety of health workers.
- ✓ Adequate provisions for water and sanitation, facilities for personal hygiene, clothing, rest, dining, safe handling and management of health care waste, and safety protocols for the use of hazardous chemicals.
- ✓ Standard operating procedures for protection of the health and safety of health workers and first responders in extreme weather events.

# DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY PROGRAMMES FOR HEALTH WORKERS

## Prepare

- ▶ Build political commitment for developing the programme.
- ▶ Assess the current situation and establish a baseline.
- ▶ Establish a task force, identify the most influential stakeholders, including employers' and workers' organizations, and ensure engagement.

## Develop

- ▶ Write the first draft of the programme.
- ▶ Carry out a feasibility assessment.
- ▶ Discuss the first draft at a meeting with key internal and external stakeholders.
- ▶ Develop a second draft and invite all stakeholders to comment.
- ▶ Finalize, obtain approval, publish and disseminate.

## Implement

- ▶ Develop a plan of action for roll-out of the implementation at different levels in stages.
  - ▶ Arrange for external inspection, audit and licensure.
  - ▶ Develop communication and technical tools for implementation.
  - ▶ Build capacities for implementation.
- Monitor, evaluate and adjust the programme.

## RESOURCES

- ▶ Caring for those who care: national programmes for occupational health for health workers. World Health Organization/International Labour Organization policy brief; 2020 (<https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/336479>).
- ▶ Caring for those who care: guide for developing and implementing occupational health and safety programmes for health workers. World Health Organization/International Labour Organization; 2022 (<https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/351436>).
- ▶ Occupational hazards in the health sector. World Health Organization e-tool (<http://www.who.int/tools/occupational-hazards-in-health-sector>).
- ▶ Protection of health and safety of health workers: checklist for health care facilities. World Health Organization; 2020 (<https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/334371>).
- ▶ HealthWISE - Work Improvement in Health Services. Action manual and trainers' guide. International Labour Organization/World Health Organization, 2014 ([https://www.ilo.org/sector/Resources/training-materials/WCMS\\_250540/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/sector/Resources/training-materials/WCMS_250540/lang--en/index.htm)).

Occupational health and safety programmes aim to prevent diseases and injuries arising out of, linked with or occurring in the course of work, while improving the quality and safety of care, safeguarding the health workforce and promoting environmental sustainability in the health sector.

This guide provides an overview of the key elements of occupational health and safety programmes for health workers at national, subnational and facility levels, as well as advice for the development and implementation of such programmes.

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