



Understanding HAVS

Hand-Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVS) is a serious, yet entirely preventable occupational health condition that affects thousands of workers across the UK and globally each year. It develops as a result of prolonged and repeated exposure to hand-transmitted vibrations, typically from powered tools such as grinders, pneumatic drills, chainsaws, and other vibrating equipment. HAVS is a progressive condition, meaning that without early detection and intervention, symptoms can worsen and become irreversible.

What Is HAVS?

HAVS is the result of damage to the nerves, blood vessels, and joints of the hand, wrist, and arm due to vibration exposure. The condition is often associated with prolonged use of handheld power tools and typically develops over months or years of repeated exposure. Common industries affected include construction, maintenance, utilities, forestry, manufacturing, and mining.

Common Symptoms Include:

- Tingling and numbness in fingers
- Loss of sensation and touch
- Difficulty with fine motor tasks
- Blanching (whitening) of fingers
- Pain and aching in hands and arms

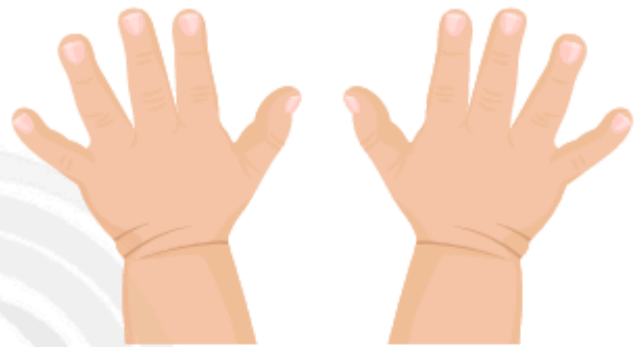


Prevention & Control Measures

Preventing HAVS begins with eliminating or reducing exposure at the source. This requires a combination of engineering controls, administrative actions, and personal protective strategies. Conducting a Risk Assessment
Employers have a legal duty under the Control of Vibration at Work Regulations 2005 to assess and manage risks associated with hand-arm vibration.

A thorough assessment should identify:

- Tasks involving vibration
- Duration and frequency of exposure
- Tool condition and usage patterns
- Vibration emission levels



Control Measures

- **Tool Selection:** Choose low-vibration tools where possible.
- **Tool Maintenance:** Ensure tools are properly maintained to reduce vibration.
- **Job Rotation:** Rotate workers to limit individual exposure time.
- **Trigger Time Monitoring:** Track how long a worker is exposed per task.
- **Anti-vibration Gloves:** These may help in reducing some exposure but should not be relied upon alone.
- **Training:** Ensure workers understand how to use equipment safely and recognize early symptoms.

Educating the Workforce

Education is critical. All workers exposed to vibration should receive training on:

- The health effects of vibration exposure
- Early symptoms and how to report them
- How to operate tools in a safe and controlled manner
- The importance of routine health surveillance

Health Surveillance & Early Referral

Why Early Occupational Health Referral Matters

Early recognition of HAVS symptoms can lead to timely medical assessment, reducing the risk of long-term damage. Employers must offer health surveillance for employees regularly exposed to vibration, especially when they exceed the exposure action value.

Surveillance may include:

- Pre-employment screening
- Regular health questionnaires
- Clinical assessments by trained occupational health professionals
- Tiered health surveillance according to HSE guidance

Early referral to occupational health should be made when:

- A worker reports symptoms of HAVS
- Risk assessments indicate regular exposure
- Workers use high-vibration tools frequently

Legal Responsibilities

Failure to protect workers from HAVS can result in:

- Legal claims and compensation payouts
- Regulatory enforcement actions
- Reputational damage
- Reduced productivity and morale



Employers must ensure compliance with:

- Control of Vibration at Work Regulations 2005
- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
- Other applicable UK health and safety laws