

Health and work update for clients as at 07 February 2023

PROMOTING, PROTECTING AND SUPPORTING HEALTH IN WORK

1. Preventing ill health and spread of infectious disease

Respiratory viruses, including influenza, COVID-19 and RSV continue to circulate. While the proportion of people testing positive for both flu and COVID-19 is decreasing throughout the UK, with COVID-19 rates ranging from 1.5% (in Northern Ireland), and 1.26% (in Wales) representing between 1 in 65 and 1 in 80 people respectively¹, there is some concern about a small increase in hospital admission rates for COVID-19. Older people and people with certain underlying health conditions remain at highest risk and advice to prevent transmission remains consistent. Those eligible for a COVID-19 booster in England are encouraged to come forward before the offer ends on Sunday 12 February². Other measures include regular hand washing with soap and warm water, catching coughs and sneezes in tissues, and keeping your home and workplace well ventilated. Vaccination is also available for flu, and is recommended for those 50 and over, have certain health conditions or are pregnant³.

2. Menopause

Many women report difficulty managing menopausal symptoms in the workplace. Coping with symptoms can be stressful, and sensitivity and awareness within the workplace are key. The British Standards Institution (BSI) is developing guidance on developing policies and practices that are supportive of employees in the workplace experiencing symptoms of menstruation or peri-menopause⁴. This is aimed at managers as well as human resources (HR) health and safety, wellbeing, and diversity and inclusion (D&I) specialists, or anyone with responsibility for managing individual performance, workload, wellbeing or work environment, across all sectors and sizes of organisations. The BSI are seeking feedback on their draft Menstrual and Menopausal Health in the Workplace Guide. The closing date for comments is 14 February 2023. Read the draft and register by email to provide feedback [here](#).

¹ National flu and COVID-19 surveillance reports published <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/national-flu-and-covid-19-surveillance-reports-published>

² NHS offers more than 400,000 final chances to get boosted <https://www.england.nhs.uk/2023/02/nhs-offers-more-than-400000-final-chances-to-get-boosted/>

³ Flu vaccine <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/flu-influenza-vaccine/>

⁴ BSI Menstrual and menopausal health in the workplace - Guide <https://standardsdevelopment.bsigroup.com/Projects/2022-02009#/section>

3. An inclusive approach to workplace health

The Health & Safety Executive (HSE) is undertaking research with employers and workers in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to examine the difference in employment rates between people with and without disabilities. The sectors in focus are human health, hospitality, agriculture, and education. Following the launch of their Talking Toolkit and guidance to support disabled workers⁵, the HSE is now seeking feedback on the impact of this guidance, with an emphasis on accessible workplaces, staff communication and preventative steps an employer can take. To participate in the research, please email: healthandworkresearch@hse.gov.uk.

Dr Finola Ryan
BMBS MRCP
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⁵ HSE Principles to support disabled workers and workers with long-term health conditions in work
https://www.hse.gov.uk/disability/best-practice/overview.htm?utm_source=govdelivery&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=disabled-workers-principles&utm_term=hieb-1&utm_content=hieb-research-2-feb-23