

Counties should take action to reduce the risk of hand-arm vibration syndrome in workers who use power tools

Workers who regularly use vibrating tools, such as jack hammers, are at risk for developing hand-arm vibration syndrome (HAVS). HAVS can result when the vibration from either a hand-held or a stationary power tool is transferred to a worker's hands. HAVS, which is also known as "white fingers" or Raynaud's Syndrome, can cause numbness, tingling and pain in fingers, hands and arms.

HAVS occurs when the blood vessels in a worker's fingers collapse due to repeated exposure to vibration and deprive the skin and muscle tissue of oxygen.

Early symptoms of HAVS include infrequent feelings of numbness and/or tingling in the fingers, hands or arms, or numbness and whiteness in the tips of the fingers when exposed to cold. As the disease progresses, the worker experiences more frequent attacks of numbness, tingling and pain and may have difficulty using his or her hands.

What can employers do to reduce vibration hazards in the workplace?

Employers are advised to remove or reduce vibration hazards by:

- Using tools with vibration-damping handles, or better yet, using non-vibrating tools.
- Ensuring that tools are well maintained
- Providing anti-vibration gloves to employees
- Adding vibration isolators or damping techniques on equipment. For mounted machines, isolate machine vibrations from the surface by using vibration isolation mounts.

- Applying damping materials to vibrating panels on machine housing and guards to control vibrations. Liquid mastics, elastomeric damping sheets and felts are all effective damping materials.
- Keeping work areas warm.

What can I do to reduce the likelihood of getting hand arm vibration syndrome?

The following steps may help to prevent HAVS in workers who use vibrating tools:

- Use the tools correctly and for no longer than necessary.
- Hold tools as loosely as possible and vary the tool's position
- Use only well-maintained tools.
- Wear anti-vibration gloves
- Take regular breaks of at least 10 minutes in length.
- Keep warm. Wear gloves when you go outside on cold days.
- Don't smoke. The chemicals in tobacco can affect blood flow.
- Don't ignore early symptoms. Tell your doctor and your employer if you experience symptoms.

For more information, contact CTSI at 303-861-0507.

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