



Workforce

Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Policy: guide for employees

This guide explains how the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Policy keeps you safe at work.

The following guide forms part of the standard for workforce policies. These policies apply to all eligible staff within NHS Scotland, regardless of the board they are employed by. The guide covers:

What is the purpose of the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Policy?	3
Who is covered by this policy?	3
Employee responsibilities	3
Health and safety department or service	4
Management of substances hazardous to health process	4
Prevention and control	4
COSHH assessment	4
Workplace exposure monitoring and health surveillance	5
Reporting and recording	5
Useful links	5

What is the purpose of the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Policy?

The aim of the COSHH Policy is to protect you from harm caused by hazardous substances at work. It sets out clear rules and procedures to prevent injuries and illness. This includes both short-term (acute) problems, like a skin reaction, and long-term (chronic) health issues that can develop over time. These guidelines help to make sure all employees follow the official [Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations](#).

Who is covered by this policy?

This policy applies to everyone working within NHS Scotland. That includes all employees, plus bank, agency, and sessional workers, volunteers, contractors, and anyone on placement, such as students or trainees.

Employee responsibilities

It's vital that you play your part in keeping the workplace safe. As an employee, you should:

- Take care of your own health and safety and that of others around you.
- Follow all training, guidance, and instructions.
- Help with the COSHH assessment process when asked.
- Never use a new substance until a COSHH assessment has been completed.
- Report any broken equipment or failures in safety systems to your manager immediately.
- Report all accidents, incidents, near misses, and unplanned exposures using your local procedure.
- Follow the safe working procedures for all hazardous substances.
- Take part in health monitoring and surveillance when required.

Health and safety department or service

The health and safety department in your health board provides guidance to you and your manager on COSHH rules. They advise on controlling exposure, using Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), and deliver training to keep you informed and safe.

Management of substances hazardous to health process

Managing hazardous substances is crucial for identifying risks and putting controls in place to prevent harm. This involves recognising what substances are hazardous by their warning symbols.

Prevention and control

The best way to stay safe is to prevent exposure to harmful substances. Where this isn't possible, exposure must be controlled to the lowest possible level.

To keep yourself and others safe, you must follow all control measures. This includes:

- Using equipment properly and following safe work processes.
- Using safer substances when you're instructed to.
- Reporting any faults with safety controls, like ventilation systems, immediately.
- Following rules like not eating or drinking in work areas to minimise exposure.

PPE, including Respiratory Protective Equipment (RPE), should only be used as a last resort, after all other control measures have been applied. If RPE is required, it must be suitable, properly fitted and maintained.

COSHH assessment

A COSHH assessment is a safety check for every hazardous substance used in the workplace. It's done by a trained person to identify the risks and establish the safest ways of working.

You must:

- Follow the findings of the COSHH assessment and stick to the safe working procedures.
- Use the safety controls provided, such as ventilation, PPE, and correct storage and disposal.
- Complete all necessary training.
- Know the emergency procedures, including first aid and fire safety measures.
- Report any issues like spills or damaged equipment immediately

Workplace exposure monitoring and health surveillance

Your health board may carry out monitoring and health checks to protect your health. It's important that you:

- cooperate with any monitoring
- report health issues promptly
- take part in health surveillance when asked
- follow any medical advice given

Engaging with these checks helps protect you and your colleagues. This might involve working with occupational health. They are responsible for confidential health records and carrying out any necessary immunisations, examinations or investigations.

Reporting and recording

You must report all incidents involving hazardous substances as soon as possible. This includes near misses, like spills that didn't cause harm but could have. Your manager is responsible for recording and investigating all incidents in accordance with local protocols and procedures.

If you are absent from work for more than 7 consecutive days due to exposure to a hazardous substance, your manager must notify the HSE.

Useful links

- [COSHH Regulations](#)
- [Workplace Exposure limits EH40/2005](#)
- [Health and Safety Executive's \(HSE\) Approved List of Biological agents](#)

- [Scottish Government Records Management: NHS Code of Practice \(Scotland\)](#)
- [HSE Clearing the air A simple guide to buying and using local exhaust ventilation \(LEV\)](#)