

Manual Handling



Overview

Manual handling injuries are one of the most common injuries in schools. Manual handling is not simply the act of lifting items – it is any activity or sequence of activities that requires a person to use their musculoskeletal system to perform work. For example, typing, using a mouse, sitting for long periods, lifting, pushing, pulling, holding, lowering, throwing, carrying, packing, cleaning and using tools can cause manual handling injuries.

Hazardous manual handling is used to describe those tasks that have the potential to cause injury through the development of Musculoskeletal Disorders (MSD). Managing manual handling in schools involves identifying hazardous manual handling tasks and implementing preventative strategies in place to control the risk.

Hazardous manual handling can involve

- Repetitive or sustained application of force, awkward postures or movements
- Tasks that a staff member would find difficult due to the degree of force required
- Handling unstable objects that are difficult to grasp or hold
- Exposure to sustained vibration
- Bending and twisting
- Repetitive and heavy lifting
- Working for long periods without adequate rest
- New or changed practices or procedures.

Common manual handling injuries in schools

- Sprains and strains
- Soft tissue injuries
- Neck and back injuries
- Slips, falls and crush injuries
- Cuts, bruises and broken bones
- Hernia
- Injuries or chronic pain affecting joints
- Injury to or compression of nerves.



Manual handling risks commonly found in schools

- moving furniture
- carrying electrical equipment, such as television and computers
- pushing a trolley
- restraining a frightened child or separating aggressive students
- typing school reports using a notebook computer in an awkward posture, or repetitive computer operation
- carrying books and resources around the school
- stretching to reach a high shelf or bending to a bottom shelf (e.g. accessing archive or paper boxes)
- lifting or moving sporting equipment (e.g. high jump mats)
- standing on a table and/or chair to pin up students' work
- lifting large bottles (e.g. 25 litres) of cleaning chemicals or lifting ladders
- moving rocks, digging etc
- bending over for extended periods to be at the same height as students.

Strategies to Reduce the Risk of Manual Handling Injuries

Manual handling risks can be managed by:

- identifying the manual handling hazards in the school
- assessing which ones are high risk
- implementing solutions to reduce the risk of injuries
- checking to see if they are working.

Identifying hazardous manual handling tasks

The school should identify the tasks that are likely to be hazardous. In consultation with staff, use the Hazardous Manual Handling Checklist to:

- List all tasks involving manual handling
- Identify tasks that involve hazardous manual handling
- Prioritise the tasks to be assessed.



Assess the risk of identified manual handling tasks

A manual handling risk assessment should be completed for tasks identified as hazardous or where there are tasks that have resulted in injury or where staff members have reported discomfort or difficulty undertaking a task.

Once the hazardous manual handling tasks have been assessed, solutions should be developed and implemented. This can be done by using one or more of the following methods:

- Eliminate the risk by not carrying out the task
- Alter the layout of the classroom or workstation
- Change the objects used. For example, can handles be added? Can bulky packages be broken down to smaller sizes?
- Provide information, instruction and training to staff in relation to safe manual handling and lifting techniques, including the development of safe work procedures.

Suggested control measures

- Change the task
- Change the object
- Use mechanical aids
- Change the workspace
- Provide training
- Lighten loads (break loads into smaller quantities)
- Reduce bending, twisting, reaching movements
- Use team lifting
- Use mechanical assistance (e.g. trolleys and adjustable height workbenches and seating)
- Monitor and review the implemented solutions to ensure new risks haven't been created.

Resources

- Manual Handling Risk Identification Checklist
- Hazard Risk Assessment Tool
- Manual Handling Code of Practice (WorkSafe)
- Officewise - A guide to health and safety in the office (WorkSafe)

Related Topics

- First Aid



Legislation

- Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (Section 21)
- Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2007 (Part 3.1 – Manual Handling)