

Home care worker

Straightforward information and practical
tips to help you sort health and safety



Safe Start Up 

www.safestartup.co.uk

Home care worker

This guide will help you with health and safety. It gives you straightforward information and practical tips. It tells you what you need to do to make sure you don't break the law, and how to protect yourself, anyone who works for you, your clients and your reputation. It also shows you where to go to get more information if you need it.

The home care business can be risky. And at the end of the day, if things go wrong it's your livelihood or business that will suffer. You'll find that you already do – or plan to do – a lot of

what's covered, and much of it is common sense. Looking after health and safety is just part of managing a business well. Done properly, you could see it save money too.

You'll find this guide helpful if you:

- own or manage a small home care business
- work as a home care provider
- work as a home help.

If you own or manage a residential care home, the business has higher risks. You'll need to follow Department of Health guidance and National Care Standards. Whether you own a new business and need to register, or you work for an existing registered provider, look at www.cqc.org.uk/organisations-we-regulate and www.hse.gov.uk/healthservices/arrangements.htm.

Who are we?

The Institution of Occupational Safety and Health is the Chartered body for health and safety professionals. We were founded in 1945 and are a registered charity. Find out more at www.iosh.co.uk.

Here to help

If you have a question, or want information on an issue you're facing, get in touch with IOSH on +44 (0)116 257 3199 or techinfo@iosh.co.uk. Our helpline is completely free.

Did you know...

In a single year, more than 50 self-employed people died from workplace injuries



By law you must...

In the UK, the law applies to all businesses, large or small. If you're self-employed or an employer then **you** are responsible for the health and safety of your business. The law is there to make sure you have a safe working environment and cut down the risk of you, your staff (if you have any), clients or members of the public getting ill or injured. So, by law you must...

Did you know...

Good health and safety saves cash: you can save £12 for every £1 you spend

...get some help with your health and safety duties

As an employer you have to appoint someone who knows about health and safety. This could be:

- yourself, if you have a health and safety qualification, knowledge and experience
- one or more of your staff, if they are qualified or you get them trained
- someone from outside the business.

Even if you don't employ any staff, don't forget that legally you have what's called a 'duty of care' to anyone who is affected by what you do for a living – from a client to a member of the public.

If you're not confident about managing health and safety in-house then you may need to call in some external help or advice.



Find out more

- Find out more at www.hse.gov.uk/business/competent-advice.htm
- Download the HSE leaflet 'Getting specialist help with health and safety' at www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg420.pdf
- Get guidance on getting professional advice at www.iosh.co.uk/information_and_resources/need_professional_advice.aspx
- Find out about our free enquiry service at www.iosh.co.uk/information_and_resources/information_help_line.aspx
- Download our free guide on getting help with health and safety at www.iosh.co.uk/techguide

By law you must...

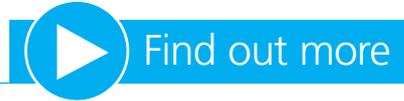
...write a health and safety policy for your business

If you employ five or more people, part or full time, you have to have a written policy.

The policy should describe how you'll manage health and safety. It lets your staff and others know that you have a serious commitment to keeping on top of risks as part of your business. It should clearly state who does what, when and how.

Your policy doesn't have to take you long to write, or be lengthy or complicated. Download the template listed in 'Find out more' and complete it, or use it as a guide to write your own.

Your policy shouldn't just be a piece of lifeless paperwork – it's designed to help you manage health and safety properly. It will only be effective if you and your staff are aware of it and follow what it says. You'll need to review it every now and then to reflect any changes – just make a note in your calendar, say once a year. You'll also need to see if it needs updating if there's been a major change, for example, to the way you work, or where you work.



- Download a policy template at www.hse.gov.uk/risk/risk-assessment-and-policy-template.doc
- Look at an example of a policy at www.hse.gov.uk/risk/health-and-safety-policy-example.doc

Did you know...

One person is seriously injured at work every 17 minutes

...manage the risk in your business

You must consider and manage any risks where you work or connected with what you do.

This is a straightforward process. Known as 'risk assessment', it involves thinking about what you do in your business that could harm people – you, your staff (if you have them), contractors or your customers or members of the public – and what you're going to do to try to stop it happening.

In your line of work, the risks you have to deal with will vary depending on the

clients you look after. You may need to look at things like:

- dealing with challenging behaviour or violence
- lifting, supporting and moving people
- where you work – the client's home and the challenges it could bring
- travelling around to different homes, particularly if it's out of hours or in isolated areas.

There may be more, but these are the main areas you may need to focus on – we look at these in a bit more detail on page 09.

Risk assessments aren't about piles of paperwork, just sensible actions to control the risks. The law doesn't expect you to remove all risks, but it does expect you to control them. You're probably doing most of this already as part of day-to-day management – but your risk assessment will help you see if what you're doing is enough or if you need to do more.



Find out more

- Look at templates and examples at www.hse.gov.uk/risk/risk-assessment-and-policy-template.doc
- Look at risk assessment case studies at www.hse.gov.uk/risk/casestudies
- Use our free risk assessment tool at www.ioshroutefinder.co.uk

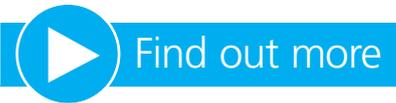
By law you must...

...talk to your employees

If you employ anyone, you need to consult them on health and safety. Again, it's not complicated – you can do this by listening and talking to them about:

- health and safety and the work they do
- how risks are controlled
- the best ways of giving information and training.

This is a two-way thing. Let your staff raise concerns and give their opinions on decisions. After all, they're often the best people to understand the risks involved in their work – and talking to them about it lets them know that you take their health and safety seriously.



- Find out more at www.hse.gov.uk/involvement/doyourbit

...give training and information

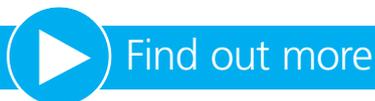
If you have staff, they need to know how to work safely and without risking their health. You must give clear instructions, information and training. Don't forget to include temporary workers.

Training could include, for example, how to support and move your clients safely. Not all training needs to be formal or expensive – for example, you could give some basic training in informal sessions yourself, based on your knowledge and experience. Remember that health and safety

training must be in working hours and you can't charge employees for it. Keeping training records will help remind you when refreshers are due.

Make sure that everyone has information on:

- hazards and risks they may face – for you, bad backs are a typical risk, for example – have a look at page 10 for more details
- what's in place to deal with hazards and risks
- what to do in an emergency.



- Download a guide on health and safety training at www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg345.pdf

By law you must...

...have the right facilities

If you employ people, you need to think about facilities. Some of these legal requirements will sound obvious, but it's a good idea to check to make sure that you've covered the welfare basics.

You need to provide:

- toilet and washing facilities
- drinking water
- somewhere to store clothing and to change if your staff wear a uniform
- somewhere to rest and eat meals.

In your job, you or your staff will be very mobile, working at client's homes, so you probably won't always have easy access to facilities. Make sure you allow enough time to have breaks when out and about. You and your team may need to take a rest break in

the car or van. To be hygienic, it's a good idea to have some basic washing facilities handy, for example hand gels that don't need water or a container of clean water.

You also need to make sure that where you work there is:

- good ventilation – with fresh, clean air
- a comfortable working temperature – usually at least 16 degrees C
- lighting suitable for the work being carried out
- enough space to work in
- a clean environment with bins provided for rubbish.

You need to keep your workplace safe by:

- maintaining and servicing your work equipment – for example, hoists have strict service and maintenance regimes
- keeping floors and corridors clear of rubbish or blockages.

A lot of this is easier said than done – going into someone's home to work can be challenging, and telling your client that you think their home is either dirty or unsafe can be very difficult. But, at the end of the day, it's you or your client who could be at risk, so if you're not happy with the environment you have to work in you should speak up. As a last resort, you can refuse to enter a property.



Find out more

- Download a guide on workplace health, safety and welfare at www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg244.pdf
- Find out more about the risks of poor facilities at www.hse.gov.uk/fee-for-intervention/basic-safety-mistakes/facilities.htm

Did you know...

One small company was fined £3,500 in court because it didn't have adequate washing facilities for employees who were at risk of getting dermatitis



By law you must...

...plan for first aid, accidents and ill health

You have to organise first aid arrangements where you work. If you employ people, you're responsible for making sure they get attention straightaway if they get ill or injured.

If you're self-employed, with no staff, you need to have a first aid kit.

If you have staff, you must have:

- a stocked first aid box
- an 'appointed person' to take charge – someone who co-ordinates first aid where you work, restocks the box when necessary

and calls an ambulance if needed. This person doesn't have to be a trained first aider

- information for employees giving details of what you've organised for first aid.

You may decide that you need someone trained in first aid. Your first aid assessment will highlight this – you just need to consider your situation and write down anything significant, along with what you plan to do to deal with it. For example, think about how far away from your nearest surgery or

hospital you could be, and whether any of your staff have complex medical conditions.

By law, you must report and keep a record of certain accidents, incidents and illness.

Did you know...

Four people are killed every week at work



Find out more

- Get information on first aid at www.hse.gov.uk/firstaid and a leaflet on first aid from www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg214.pdf
- Find out what needs reporting and how at www.hse.gov.uk/riddor/index.htm
- Buy an accident book from the HSE at books.hse.gov.uk or record the details in your own system

...display the health and safety law poster

If you employ anyone, you must either display this poster, or give each member of staff the pocket card version. The poster outlines UK health and safety law and includes a simple list that tells employers what they and

their employees need to do. There is also space on it for you to name your health and safety representatives, if you have any, and health and safety contacts, for example, your local environmental health office.



Find out more

- You can get copies of the poster and pocket cards from www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/lawposter.htm

By law you must...

...get insurance for your business

If you have employees you'll probably need employers' liability insurance. It protects you against any costs of compensation in claims made against you by an employee if they get injured

or ill and it's caused by your business. There may be other types of cover you need, such as public liability and business use for vehicles.

Did you know...

One small business owner was fined nearly £4,000 with costs of £3,000 after it was found to have no Employers' Liability Compulsory Insurance



Find out more

- Download information on employers' liability insurance at www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/hse40.pdf
- Find out more on insurance at www.abi.org.uk/Information/Business/15310.pdf and www.abi.org.uk/Information/Business/40507.pdf

...keep your business up to date

Keeping up with news and developments in your sector will help you keep your health and safety policy and risk assessments up to date. You'll find help through trade unions, employers' organisations, Business Link and trade associations.



Find out more

- Read IOSH news and sign up to RSS news feeds at www.iosh.co.uk/news
- Subscribe to free ebulletins at www.hse.gov.uk/news/subscribe
- Get podcasts from www.hse.gov.uk/podcasts
- Get SMS text alerts to your mobile from www.hse.gov.uk/sms

Issues to think about

We've covered some of the basic things you need to do to comply with the law. Here, we look at some specific issues and legal duties relevant to your work.

Dealing with challenging behaviour

Some clients with mental illness such as dementia or learning difficulties may pose a threat to you with erratic or even violent behaviour or physical attacks. 'Forensic clients' may present obvious risks, but other clients may act aggressively, feeling frustrated, confused or angry because of their health situation and lack of independence.

This isn't always easy to deal with, but that doesn't mean that you should accept aggressive or threatening behaviour – it's against the law.

Each client should be assessed to see what risks they could pose – not just potentially becoming aggressive or violent, but also if a health condition means that they may become forgetful or confused, for example leaving a cooker hob on, or a cigarette burning. You should keep a formal record of the assessment.

You, or your staff, should try to defuse difficult situations by talking to the client, or trying to change the subject. You could also try getting help from your client's neighbours or relatives.

If you work with potentially violent clients, you should:

- be trained in the right 'control and restraint' techniques
- call the police if threatening or aggressive behaviour gets out of hand
- make sure you can get to an exit easily if the situation gets worse
- have access to a panic button or clip-on safety alarm pin.

Did you know...

Violence and aggression is the third biggest cause of injury in social care



Find out more

- Find out more about dealing with difficult or aggressive behaviour at www.hse.gov.uk/healthservices/violence/index.htm
- Find out more about control and restraint at www.hse.gov.uk/foi/internalops/ocs/200-299/213_2.htm#para31

Issues to think about

Lifting, supporting and moving people

A lot of your work could be quite physical, from helping a client use the toilet to bathing them. So you could suffer strains, aches and pains affecting your back or joints. Even just moving or repositioning a client can cause damage as you're not only using physical effort, but are likely to be in an awkward posture or position too, reaching, bending or twisting. Don't forget that tasks that involve supporting your client or holding their arm or leg in the same position for long stretches can lead to problems too.

Make sure that you (and your staff, if you have any) get proper training in safe handling techniques. If you can, work in pairs or teams to lighten the load.

You may also be able to use handling aids such as transfer benches, sliding boards, low friction slide sheets, posts, hoists or shower chairs to help take the strain.

Watch out for slipping or tripping risks, especially when you're supporting your client physically and they're unsteady on their feet. You should:

- check floors are dry after cleaning and clear up spills quickly, and if you're outside, sweep away wet leaves and avoid muddy surfaces if you can
- check access routes, for example, making sure that corridors are clear and stairs and steps are clutter-free

- look at lighting levels – make sure that there's enough light, especially if you need to help your client after dark
- ask for pets to be put in a separate room if they're likely to get in the way.

You'll also need to bear in mind the risk of your client falling as you support or move them about – make sure that you and your staff know what to do. It goes against your instincts, but you should never try to stop a client from falling, but instead control their fall to the floor – you should have basic training in how to do this.



Find out more

- Download a guide on cutting down manual handling risks at www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/hsg225.htm

Did you know...

Almost half the accidents in the social and healthcare sector involve lifting and carrying, mostly through helping people with their mobility

Did you know...

Around 5,000 handling injuries a year are in health services, with around 2,000 in social care



Issues to think about

Working in your client's home

Depending on your clients, you could be exposed to infectious diseases, including hepatitis, HIV, MRSA or flu when you're providing direct client care, such as dressing, bathing, cleaning and cooking for infected clients. Make sure that you:

- clear up straightaway and disinfect after any spillage
- dispose of or disinfect equipment or clothing that's been contaminated with blood or other bodily fluids
- cover any cuts or grazes with waterproof dressings
- wear protective clothing such as gloves, aprons and eye and mouth protection where there's a risk of splashing

- wash your hands properly – for example using the technique at www.hpa.org.uk/webc/HPAwebFile/HPAweb_C/1194947384669.

You may also be at risk if you need to administer medicines or use prescribed products as part of a client's medical plan. Think about the risks involved with using incontinence supplies or diabetic monitors, or changing catheters. You'll need disposable gloves and towels, hand disinfectant and face masks when handling medical products that may be infected with blood or other body fluids.

Never administer medicine without consultation with a medical

professional first – you must work closely with social service and medical professionals.

You also need to think about how to avoid problems if you're cleaning a client's home. Some chemicals in household products can irritate or burn your eyes and skin, some can irritate the lungs and others could cause longer term health effects such as asthma and dermatitis. Try to:

- follow the instructions on product labels – they're there for a reason. Don't mix cleaning products as they can give off toxic vapours
- open windows to let in fresh air
- keep cleaning cloths separate from cloths used in food preparation areas
- use cleaning equipment with long handles for hard-to-reach areas
- put a folded towel under your knees if you have to kneel to clean floors or do other jobs – this helps avoid pressure on your knees.



Find out more

- Download guidance on infection control at www.hse.gov.uk/biosafety/infection.htm

Travelling and working alone

Make sure you keep on top of your car maintenance and servicing and avoid driving if you're over-tired or feel stressed or upset.

A lot of the work that you or your staff do will be alone. Think about the risks not just when getting around on your own – particularly if you're visiting homes out of hours, or in isolated or rough areas – but also when you're in your client's home. You should:

- have your mobile phone with you all the time, and carry your safety alarm if you work with clients who pose more of a risk
- let a friend or relative know where you're planning to go each day, if your work isn't rostered in formally
- consider a simple 'call in' system so that colleagues know you are safe.

Think about how to deal with emergencies, either as a result of a sudden problem with your client's health, or an accident, fire or other emergency. You should:

- plan what to do if you have to deal with an emergency and make sure you have the right numbers handy
- make sure you know the escape routes, particularly if you're in a multi-storey building.

Did you know...

Driving accidents are one of the most frequent causes of accidents for home care workers – and they're the biggest cause of fatal accidents



Find out more

- Get guidance on driving issues at www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg382.pdf
- Download a guide on lone working at www.advancedecm.com/resources/lone-worker-safety-guide.pdf
- Download our 'Going it alone' guide at www.iosh.co.uk/safestartup

Issues to think about

You also need to consider...

- **Fire precautions** – think about how a fire could start (the top two reasons are arson and electrical faults) and how your client, and you or your staff, would escape if there were a fire. You may need to think about how you'd get someone with limited mobility out of the building quickly. Talk to your local authority adviser or a health and safety consultant if you need more help.
- **Electrics** – are the electrics safe in the home that you're visiting? Are you bringing your own equipment with you and is it suitable for the job you're doing? Make sure you don't use overloaded electrical sockets.

Did you know...

Faulty electrics – appliances, wiring, and overloaded sockets – cause around 7,000 house fires across the country each year



Find out more

- Get more information about fire precautions at www.communities.gov.uk/fire/firesafety/firesafetylaw
- Find out about getting your electrics tested at www.hse.gov.uk/electricity/faq.htm#maintaining-it-safely
- Have a look at www.hse.gov.uk/healthservices/index.htm for more practical guidance on working in the health and social care services sector

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This IOSH guide is designed as an introduction to health and safety basics for low risk businesses, and is not intended to give exhaustive coverage of the subject. We encourage all employers and business owners to find out more about the detailed legal requirements affecting your business at www.hse.gov.uk.

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IOSH is the Chartered body for health and safety professionals. With more than 42,000 members in 100 countries, we're the world's largest professional health and safety organisation.

We set standards, and support, develop and connect our members with resources, guidance, events and training. We're the voice of the profession, and campaign on issues that affect millions of working people.

IOSH was founded in 1945 and is a registered charity with international NGO status.

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