



## **HAND ARM VIBRATION SYNDROME (HAVS).**

Summer heralds the introduction of a major piece of new legislation when the **Physical Agents (Vibration) Directive** becomes law on 6 July, 2005. This law is being introduced as a means of addressing the well recognized complications of exposure to vibration in the workplace.

Workers who are regularly exposed to vibration may suffer damage to various bodily tissues. Injuries can affect internal structures e.g. back, bowel, heart...) and / or the limbs (e.g. hands and fingers). An important example is the **Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVS)** of which **Vibration White Finger (VWF)** is a feature.

Many workers, in a variety of sectors, use vibrational tools. Examples include hand-held power tools (drills, grinders, chainsaws, percussive hammers...), hand-guided machinery and / or the holding of materials as they are processed by machines. HAVS is a common problem across the entire construction industry (e.g. road-building, utilities, railways...) and is a recognized complication in such sectors as mining, forestry and car bodyshops.

HAVS causes damage to blood vessels, nerves, muscles and soft tissues in the hands and fingers. If left unchecked, then the outcome may be extremely debilitating. Symptoms include numbness, tingling, pain, reduced dexterity and loss of grip strength. Sometimes the fingers turn white ("blanching") and hence the term "**white finger**". In extreme cases the finger tips become gangrenous.

In meeting the demands imposed by the Vibration Directive, employers will be required to establish a regular programme of **Health Surveillance**. The latest guidelines issued to health professionals by the HSE outlines a 5-tiered approach to health surveillance for HAVS. This includes questionnaires, physical inspection / examination of the hands and more specialized "laboratory" tests (in some cases).

Staff from "Express Medicals" were fortunate to attend the inaugural HSE-accredited HAVS course. We already operate an established HAVS screening service and have forged a close relationship with a HAVS laboratory in the Midlands. Having recently established an association with a leading academic centre, we have commenced plans to open a dedicated, expert HAVS centre in London to serve both London and the South of England.

Further information  
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