



Recommendations for protecting Health Care Workers' Health

Facts

- Health care facilities' main "resource" is the staff comprising different professional groups. Whatever the group, health care professionals are highly committed to their work and emphasize care quality given to patients, sometimes to their own health detriment.
- Occupational health risks in health care work are numerous. They are related to exposure to the following: infectious agents, various chemicals (including drugs), allergens, radiation, heavy musculoskeletal loads, shift work, physical violence, various forms of mental charge and psychological stress.
- Occupational risks prevention for health care workers varies from country to country. In some countries preventive measures are fairly well developed, in others they are practically non-existent.
- Health care workers often have little knowledge of their occupational risks as well as preventive means.
- Regarding infectious risks, prevention is mostly insufficient in countries where these diseases are highly prevalent.

Recommendations for policy makers, managers, health care professionals and occupational health and safety specialists

- Occupational risks prevention needs to be an integral part of management, administration and assessment processes, particularly health care procedures and health care quality assessment.
- Occupational health and safety services must be available for all health care workers (HCWs) whatever health care facilities.
- All HCWs occupational risks must be regularly assessed, covering physical, chemical, ergonomic, biological and psychosocial work environment.
- Systematic occupational risks prevention programmes must be defined, allocating specific means required. HCW must actively participate in planning and implementation of these programs.

- All health care staff must receive information and training on occupational risks and preventive means, including hygiene.
- Collective protective measures, including those related to hand washing and other personal hygiene facilities, must be implemented. Appropriate personal protective equipment must be provided to staff.
- Occupational infectious risks prevention must be integrated into each organization's hygiene policy: nosocomial infections' fight includes protective measures for health care workers.
- Health care staff immunization programmes' implementation is necessary. Access to medical advice, vaccination and, if needed, post-exposure prophylaxis must be provided free of charge.
- Prevention programmes must be reviewed, and risks regularly reassessed to improve prevention.