

Stress Awareness Week: Employers have to fulfil legal duty

Britain's workplace health and safety regulator, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), is calling on all employers during Stress Awareness Week 2024 to carry out their legal duty to prevent work-related stress and support good mental health at work.

HSE figures show the average employee suffering from work-related stress, depression or anxiety took an average of 19.6 days off work, almost the equivalent of a month's working days, with an estimated 875,000 cases in 2022/23.

HSE's Working Minds campaign provides employers with simple steps to prevent days lost due to work-related stress.

Kayleigh Roberts, Work-Related Stress and Mental Health Policy Lead at HSE, said: "Our statistics clearly outline that there is a work-related stress issue in Britain and we want this to change. A total of 17.1 million working days were lost in 2022/23, and this figure has a serious cost to the individual and to the business. Employers can make a difference by understanding and fulfilling their legal duty to prevent work-related stress and support good mental health at work.

"That is why we are reminding employers during Stress Awareness Week that it is critical they recognise the signs of work-related stress and get to the root causes behind this issue. Prevention is better than cure and understanding the risks is the first step to preventing them."

The legal duties for employers are:

- Carry out risk assessments for stress and act on them.
- Take steps to prevent work-related stress.
- Organisations with fewer than five employees don't have to write anything down (but it is useful to do this, for future review)
- Organisations with five or more employees, are required by law to write the risk assessment down.

There are six main areas that can lead to work-related stress if they are not managed properly. These are: demands, control, support, relationships, role and change. Factors like skills and experience, age, or disability may all affect someone's ability to cope.

HSE offers employers free risk assessment templates and free online training to help bosses keep their workforce healthy.

Kayleigh added: "Although tackling stress may appear daunting for some employers, failing to recognise the signs of work-related stress and acting on them can result in reduced productivity, sickness absence or even losing a valued member of staff. I would urge all employers who are looking for

guidance to seek help through our Working Minds campaign, which helps companies follow five simple steps.”

Working Minds calls on employers to follow the five Rs. They are to Reach out and have conversations, Recognise the signs and causes of stress, Respond to any risks you’ve identified, Reflect on actions you’ve agreed and taken, and make it Routine.

Andrew Berrie, Head of Corporate Partnerships at Mind, said: “We’re delighted to continue to support HSE’s Working Minds campaign. Mind has long been working with employers of different sizes and sectors to help them create mentally healthy workplaces, but as these insights show, this has never been more important.

“While many of us will face pressure in our working lives, unchecked and unmanageable pressures can lead to strain and can have a debilitating effect, resulting in stress. Stress can cause mental health problems, and make existing problems worse. For example, if you often struggle to manage feelings of stress, you might develop a mental health problem like anxiety or depression.

“It is vital that employers take steps to mitigate against work-related stress and create an environment in which employees can have open and honest conversations about triggers of stress and poor mental health. This can start with just a simple, person-centred conversation between managers and their teams.”

Jenny Scott, Head of Communications at NEBOSH, said: “The statistics show a worrying picture of the mental ill health that people experience because of their work. But it doesn’t have to be this way. We are delighted to continue our support for the Working Minds campaign, which provides great resources for employers who want to foster good mental health and prevent work-related stress. We will also welcome the HSE’s Phoebe Smith to the NEBOSH Online Conference this November where she will guide delegates through the essential steps of creating a work-related stress risk assessment.”

There are three main reasons employers should prevent work-related stress and support good mental health; it’s the law, it’s good for business and it’s the right thing to do.

What can employers do during Stress Awareness Week?:

- [register for our free online learning](#)
- [download a risk assessment template](#)
- see the [Talking Toolkit](#) for help structuring your conversations
- [access resources](#) to share with others

Notes to editors:

1. [The Health and Safety Executive](#) (HSE) is Britain’s national regulator for workplace health and safety. We are dedicated to protecting people and places, and helping everyone lead safer and healthier lives.
2. To read more about HSE’s Working Minds campaign click [here](#)

3. For press and media enquiries please contact media.enquiries@hse.gov.uk