

Fatigue in the Workplace

COVID-19

Due to the rapidly evolving changes in the workplace from the COVID-19 pandemic, workers are suddenly experiencing substantial changes to their work schedules, work environments, expectations, and demands from their employers.

Rapid and unpredictable changes in the workplace often lead to workplace fatigue. However, it is still the duty of the employer to recognize signs and symptoms of workplace fatigue and make reasonable accommodations for their staff.

Examples of workplace changes during COVID-19 that may increase employee fatigue:

- Additional and/or changes in processes to accommodate mandates to minimize the spread of the virus.
- Working longer hours to accommodate unusually high production/demands of the organization with fewer employees.
- Prolonged exposure to potential health hazards such as visual display terminal (VDT Illness), noise, chemicals, manual material handling, and repetitive motion.
- Working at home full time in a less than ideal work environment (ex: children/spouse at home causing distractions, poor ergonomics/individual workstation(s), clutter, pets, and other responsibilities).
- Increased time in a motor vehicle "Windshield Time" (Construction, First-Responders, Medical Professionals, Restaurant/Delivery Drivers, and other "Essential Personnel are most susceptible). Essential businesses are noted in the CA Executive Order link below.
<https://covid19.ca.gov/img/Executive-Order-N-33-20.pdf>

Fatigue Prevention Strategies during COVID-19

- Make adjustments to the workplace to increase alertness and productivity (changing lights, encouraging walks, and physical activity).
- Provide additional Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to prevent over-exposure to chemicals, noise, inclement weather, and repetitive tasks when the work environment cannot be controlled.

- Add job rotation or staggered shift scheduling to allow more employees to be involved in the production needs. This effectively reduces physical fatigue.
- Limit the number of hours of work per day for each staff member. This effectively "lessens the load" for each employee reducing mental and emotional fatigue.
- Encourage work from home employees to frequently take breaks and engage with co-workers electronically regarding non-work related tasks as they would during normal circumstances.
- Check-in individually with all staff members to offer feedback and be aware of signs and symptoms of fatigue (Anxiety, Irritable, Depression, Stress, etc.).
- Train workers to fully understand the hazards and symptoms of fatigue and equip them with responsibility in reporting symptoms without the fear of retaliation.

Please Note

Identifying fatigue in the workplace is crucial in ensuring your employees remain engaged, productive, and most importantly, safe during this COVID-19 pandemic. Implementing effective health and safety strategies during this time can prevent increases in "workplace accidents" and "overwhelming stress" occurrences to workers. These occurrences can be reportable to your workers compensation insurance and therefore can impact your organization's bottom line.

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Please contact the Loss Control team at:
losscontrol@bhhc.com for any further questions.