

Occupational health and safety of physiotherapists

Policy statement

© World Physiotherapy 2023
www.world.physio



Recommended citation: World Physiotherapy. Policy statement: Occupational health and safety of physiotherapists. London, UK: World Physiotherapy; 2023. Available from: <https://world.physio/policy/ps-occupational-health>

Occupational health and safety of physiotherapists

World Physiotherapy endorses the concept of decent work and advocates for the right of physiotherapists to safe and healthy work and work environments that assures their own health and safety and that of their patients/clients. (1)

World Physiotherapy supports international conventions and promotes the development and application of international, national and local policies and/or procedures that will safeguard physiotherapists' right to safe and healthy practice environments (2-5), wherever they practice.

World Physiotherapy advocates for the development and provision of occupational health and safety legislation covering the whole physiotherapy workforce.

World Physiotherapy believes in the prevention of undesirable work-related outcomes resulting from occupational hazards, supporting initiatives for health promotion, injury and illness prevention, reduction/avoidance of exposure to occupational hazards and elimination of these hazards to the extent possible.

World Physiotherapy also supports the allocation of resources to ensure the best occupational health and safety services and the inspection of practice settings.

World Physiotherapy encourages member organisations to do the following.

1. Urge their governments and employers of physiotherapists to:

- adopt safe systems of work, and a risk management approach (6) to occupational health and safety (7)
- demonstrate compliance with the occupational health and safety (OHS) requirements of their individual country (8)
- ensure that health facilities are designed and maintained according to OHS requirements
- encourage the development of culturally appropriate occupational health and safety policies and intervention/treatment plans, including return-to-work programmes following a period of prolonged absence (9)
- encourage a self-monitoring process to achieve compliance with industry regulated standards that meet the OHS requirements for physiotherapy professionals, students of the profession, volunteers and other workers with whom physiotherapists interact.

2. Facilitate safe and healthy work environments for physiotherapists by

- raising their awareness of occupational hazards and associated risks that may be relevant to their practice
- raising physiotherapists' awareness of appropriate controls and risk management practices
- advocating for physiotherapists' access to operational controls for occupational health and safety risks (10) including
 - safe systems of work (7)
 - appropriate staffing levels (numbers and skill mix) and conditions of employment (e.g. remuneration, sick leave, holiday)
 - supporting rights to respectful work environments, free from discrimination, intimidation, violence, sexual harassment and bullying

-
- appropriate injury/illness reporting systems
 - immunisation
 - appropriate personal protective equipment (e.g. clothing, masks, gloves)
- supporting those with responsibility for managing physiotherapists to implement appropriate systems by promoting awareness of relevant existing and emerging issues
 - informing employers of physiotherapists about their obligations to induct, train and consult with their staff about relevant occupational hazards and their control
 - cooperating with other organisations supporting physiotherapists' rights to safe and healthy work environments
 - extending these measures to students of the profession, volunteers and other workers with whom physiotherapists interact
 - promoting policies for physiotherapists practising alone as sole practitioners or in rural, remote or isolated practice environments
3. Promote scholarship and research into safe physiotherapy practice for practitioners including health promotion, work organisation, the work environment and risk management.
 4. Recognise and promote the contribution of physiotherapists working in the OHS domain to support the creation of a safe work environment for work colleagues.
-

Glossary (<https://world.physio/resources/glossary>)

Decent work

Hazard

Health

Health promotion

Manual handling

Occupational health and safety (OHS)

Positive practice environments (PPE)

Practice settings

Approval, review and related policy information	
Date adopted:	Approved at the 17th General Meeting of WCPT in June 2011. Revised and re-approved at the 18th General Meeting of WCPT May 2015. Revised and re-approved at the 19th General Meeting of WCPT May 2019. Revised and re-approved at the 20 th General meeting of WCPT May 2023.
Date for review:	2027
Related World Physiotherapy policies:	World Physiotherapy policy statements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infection prevention and control • Standards of physiotherapy practice • Ethical principles and the responsibilities of physiotherapists and member organisations

References

1. International Labour Organization. Decent Work: International Labour Organization; 2023 [Available from: <http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang--en/index.htm>].
2. International Labor Organization. Occupational Health Services Convention. Geneva, Switzerland: ILO; 1985 [Available from: https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C161].
3. International Labor Organization. Protocol of 2002 to the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981. Geneva, Switzerland.; 2002.
4. International Labour Organization. Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention. Geneva, Switzerland.; 2006.
5. World Health Organization. Declaration on Occupational Health For All. Geneva, Switzerland.1994 [Available from: https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO_OCH_94.1].
6. International Standards Organization. ISO 31000 Risk Management 2018 [Available from: <https://www.iso.org/iso-31000-risk-management.html>].
7. International Standards Organization. ISO 45001 Occupational Health and Safety Geneva2018 [Available from: <https://www.iso.org/publication/PUB100427.html>].
8. International Labour Organization. Guidelines on occupational safety and health management systems 2009 [cited 2023 Access date 30 September 2023]. Available from: https://www.ilo.org/safework/info/standards-and-instruments/WCMS_107727/lang--en/index.htm.
9. World Health Professions Alliance. Positive Practice Environments (PPE) Campaign Geneva, Switzerland: Positive Practice Environments (PPE) Campaign; 2022 [1 Dec 2023]. Available from: <https://www.whpa.org/activities/positive-practice-environments>.
10. International Labor Organization. List of Occupational Diseases (revised 2010). Geneva, Switzerland.2010 [Available from: https://www.ilo.org/safework/info/publications/WCMS_125137/lang--en/index.htm].

© World Physiotherapy 2023