



The HR professional's best friend

Weekly article

## Safety comes first

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It is estimated that 6 million working days were lost last year due to workplace accidents. Given the likelihood of incidents, the ability to provide immediate medical attention to employees who become injured should be a consideration for all employers but is it a legal requirement? We explain some facts about first aid in the workplace.

Under the Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations 1981 employers are required to provide adequate and appropriate equipment, facilities and personnel to enable first aid to be given to employees if they are injured or become ill at work. These Regulations apply to all workplaces including those with five or fewer employees.

Employers are required to carry out an assessment of first aid needs to identify what is "adequate" in the circumstances. This involves consideration of workplace hazards and risks, the size of the organisation and other relevant factors, to determine what first aid equipment, facilities and personnel should be provided.

### Requirement for first aiders

As a minimum requirement all employers must have an appointed person who has responsibility for first aid equipment and who will take charge when someone is hurt, for example, by calling the ambulance. Appointed persons should not attempt to give first aid for which they have not been trained.

According to HSE guidelines low risk workplaces, such as shops and offices, should have at least one first aider if they employ more than 50 employees. Workplaces with at least 100 staff should have two first aiders and one additional first aider for every 100 staff. The first aiders must be qualified, which means that they must have completed a first aid at work course provided by an HSE approved training organisation.

Where the work involves medium risk, such as assembly work or warehousing, first aiders are recommended where there are 20 or more employees. High risk workplaces, using machinery or chemicals, should have one first aider if they employ between 5 – 50 employees and if they employ more than 50, one additional first aider for every 50 employed.

### First aid equipment

As a minimum all employers must have a suitably stocked first aid box. The first aid box must be clearly visible with a white cross on a green background and should be placed in a prominent and easily accessible location, ideally near a sink or washbasin. Consideration should also be given to providing remote workers or those travelling long distances with a personal first aid box.

The contents of a first aid box should include:

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Part of Clarkslegal LLP  
Offices in Cardiff, Reading, London and Swansea

**For more information**  
Call the employmentbuddy info-line  
Tel: 0118 953 3955



- 20 individually wrapped sterile adhesive dressings of assorted sizes
- 2 sterile eye pads
- 4 individually wrapped triangular bandages
- 6 safety pins
- 8 individually wrapped sterile unmedicated wound dressings (6 medium and 2 large)
- A pair of disposable gloves.

Depending upon the employers risk assessment, additional equipment may be required. If mains tap water is not readily available, at least one litre of sterile water or saline solution should be provided. Other items may include scissors, adhesive tape, disposable aprons or individually wrapped moist wipes. These should be placed in the first aid box or stored in a close location.

First aid at work does not include giving tablets, or medication to treat illness although employers can make non-prescription drugs, such as paracetamol, or aspirin, available in the workplace. However, if these are provided they should not be kept in the first aid box and first aiders administering these tablets should have a reasonable understanding of what is involved.

The contents of the first aid box should be checked regularly and any used items should be replaced. Sterile items that have passed the expiry dates should be safely disposed of and replaced.

In some workplaces, it may be necessary to provide a designated room specifically for providing first aid. A first aid room should be clearly identified as such by white lettering or a white cross on a green background and should be easily accessible to stretchers. A first aid room should be equipped with:

- A sink with hot and cold running water
- Drinking water and disposable cups
- Soap and paper towels
- A store for first aid materials
- Foot-operated refuse containers, lined with disposable yellow clinical waste bags or a container for the safe disposal of clinical waste
- A couch with waterproof protection, clean pillows and blankets
- A chair
- A telephone or other communication equipment
- A record book for recording incidents where first aid has been given

## Record keeping

Under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995 (RIDDOR) employers are legally required to record, for reporting purposes, work-related accidents which result in death, major injury or absence lasting more than 3 days.

However, as recommended good practice, employers should also record the details of all incidents that required first aid assistance. This information can be used to re-assess the risk of workplace injury and can help identify measures that could be taken to control the risk to health and safety.

Employers must inform employees of the first aid arrangements in place, including where the first aid box is located and who the appointed persons or first aiders are and their contact details. First aid can save lives and prevent minor injuries becoming major ones, so it pays for employers to take heed of DR ABC (danger, response, airways, breathing, and circulation)!