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## Why should an employer think about the health and safety of young people?

There is evidence to explain why employers need to think about the health and safety of young people engaged in their workplace.

**In the UK:**

- There have been 71 young people up to the age of 24 killed at work in the UK in the last five years<sup>1</sup> (this excludes any work-related transport deaths)
- There have been 15, 205 young people up to the age of 24 who have suffered a non fatal major injury in the last 5 years
- Most of the fatalities were young males (69 of the 71)
- Male workers in construction and agriculture are at the highest risk (these two sectors account for almost 50% of fatalities in this age range in the UK)
- The majority of these incidents occur in SMEs.

There is evidence from elsewhere to support having a particular focus on young people and those new to the job.

- A Canadian study for the Canadian Institute for Work and Health (2003) showed that young, inexperienced people are 5 times more likely to be injured during their first 4 weeks in the workplace
- A US Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (2010) study over a ten year period (1998 – 2007) showed that 7.9 million young workers were treated in hospital – this is double the rate for older workers

- The European Agency for Occupational Safety and Health (2007) estimate that young people aged 16-24 are at least 50% more likely to be injured at work than older people.

It is also worth considering that 85% of all 16-24 year olds in the world live in developing countries where the health and safety risks are far more pronounced. There is little statistical evidence and widespread under-reporting of workplace injuries and ill health.

**Why are young people at risk in the workplace?**

A range of factors can be responsible for a young person getting injured or being made ill at work.

- **Less competence.**  
Young people will have usually received less training and have less experience than older workers. It follows therefore that young people are likely to be less competent than older workers when performing the same duties
- **More likely to undertake physical work.**  
Young people, especially young males, are more likely to perform physically demanding work. They are often employed in so-called ‘3D jobs’ – these are jobs which are dirty, dangerous or demeaning, in which the risks of being injured are generally greater



- **More likely to be employed under irregular working arrangements.**

Young people are far more likely to be employed under irregular working arrangements. This can include casual, temporary, or part-time work, for which they are likely to receive less training, or shift work, which may result in less supervision especially when working at night.

- **More likely to take risks?**

Young people, especially some young males, may display an indifferent or carefree attitude towards risk. They may have an increased willingness to take risks resulting in them taking shortcuts concerning workplace safety

- **Reluctance to ‘speak up’.**

Young people may be reluctant to ‘speak up’ about a workplace hazard. This can result from a lack of faith in their ability, a lack of confidence, not knowing how to, a fear of challenging older workers, a fear of being wrong or a fear of being blamed.

<sup>1</sup> HSE Statistics 2011/12.