

Briefing

Employment adjustments for people with asthma

Employment adjustments for people with asthma

This briefing is not an authoritative statement of the law. While we have made every effort to ensure that the information we have provided is correct, Business Disability Forum cannot accept any responsibility or liability.

Contents

Introduction	4
Employment and people with asthma	16
Reasonable adjustments and best practice	18
Support the employee in managing their condition	27
Induction, training and development	28
Health and safety	29
Occupational asthma and redeployment	30
Harassment	32
Further sources of reference	33
Contact us	36

Introduction

What are respiratory conditions?

Respiratory conditions affect the respiratory system of an individual, from nose to lung. The respiratory system is in charge of transporting the oxygen contained in the outside air into our body. The oxygen is then used by our cells to create the energy required for our body to function.

Respiratory conditions impact different parts of the respiratory system; if the supply of oxygen is compromised, it can have an impact on other areas of the body and on how other parts of the body function. Amongst the most well-known respiratory conditions are asthma, pneumonia, lung cancer, cystic fibrosis, sleep apnea, tuberculosis, pulmonary fibrosis and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease but many other conditions exist.

What is asthma?

Although asthma is commonly regarded as a childhood condition, many adults have asthma and the symptoms of adult asthma are often more severe than those experienced by children.

Asthma is an inflammatory condition of the airways. When someone with asthma comes into contact with something they are allergic or sensitive to, their airways become narrower as the muscles around the airways tighten, making it harder to breathe. A person experiencing an asthma attack will often experience coughing, wheezing and a tightening in the chest.

The majority of people with asthma will only experience attacks when exposed to a particular irritant or trigger. However, some people with chronic asthma will experience symptoms of coughing and breathlessness almost continuously, although the severity of these symptoms will vary.

Employment adjustments for people with asthma

A trigger is anything that irritates the airways. Everyone's asthma is different and a person with asthma will often have several asthma triggers. Common triggers include:

- Respiratory infections – such as colds, flu, or bronchitis.
- Allergens – substances which some people are allergic to, e.g. pollen, foods, dust, moulds, feathers, animals fur, house-dust mites and some forms of medication.
- Irritants in the air – e.g. dirt, tobacco smoke, gases, chemical fumes and odours.
- Over-exertion – such as running too fast or carrying heavy loads.
- Climate and temperature – such as very cold air, windy weather, hot and humid weather, high ozone levels or sudden changes in weather.
- Emotional stress – such as anxiety, fear or excitement.

Managing workplace triggers

Once you have identified the triggers that aggravate an employee's condition you can take steps to manage the environment to prevent or reduce the employee's contact with them.

Identifying and managing environmental triggers can be challenging and the effectiveness of solutions will vary according to the number of triggers, the severity of the respiratory condition, the nature of the workplace and the individual's role.

Below are listed some steps to control respiratory conditions caused by allergens, e.g. pollen, foods, dust, mould, feathers, animal fur and house-dust mites. These will be beneficial to employees with asthma but also for all those with lung disease.

Dust and moulds

- Use a dehumidifier to dry the air as this makes it harder for house-dust mites to survive, and can prevent the growth of mould and mildew.
- Do not use brooms and brushes to dry sweep as it can cause high levels of air- borne dust. Instead use an industrial vacuum cleaner that has good suction and a filtered exhaust which does not scatter dust. Wipe all surfaces with a damp cloth and clean upholstery and soft furnishings using an anti-house dust mite product.
- Where it is not possible to make changes to the whole work environment, discuss with the employee and seek occupational health advice to determine whether providing the employee with a partitioned workstation that is as dust free as possible is an option.

Feathers or animal hair

- Restrict the presence of animals to your premises with the exception of work animals and assistance dogs for disabled people.
- Where it is not possible to remove animals from the workplace, protect the individual from exposure to the animal by designing animal facilities with local exhaust ventilation, providing segregated work and rest stations for vulnerable employees and restricting areas where the animal can go.

Food

Food allergies to certain fruit, nuts, shellfish, dairy products, eggs and food colourings are often associated with asthma and other respiratory conditions.

- Provide information about the food ingredients in your canteen or refreshment areas. Consult your employees and provide allergen free options wherever possible.
- Provide a food storage and preparation area for employees who need to bring pre- prepared food from home.
- Make sure catering for any work party or function has allergen-free alternatives.
- Raise awareness of food allergy and food hygiene among your workforce to reduce the risk of exposure and of cross contamination of foods.

Irritants in the air e.g. dirt, tobacco smoke, gases, chemical fumes, perfumes and odours

- Provide a well maintained ventilation system to prevent dirt and moisture accumulating. Ensure the system is not distributing pollutants throughout the worksite from locations within or outside the building.
- Have an air quality test performed by an industrial hygiene professional and ensure that appropriate actions are taken to act on results.
- In the UK, it is already against the law to smoke in buildings, but you can also prohibit smoking near the main entrance, exits and access routes to and from your building.

Employment adjustments for people with asthma

- Use the low allergen/non-toxic building materials, furnishings and supplies wherever possible, including cleaning products, pesticides, gardening products.
- Refer to Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Control of substances hazardous to health (COSHH) [1].
- Minimise and control the use of known irritants and pollutants using Control of substances hazardous to health (COSHH) standards[2].
- Store, handle and use hazardous substances with care to minimise the presence of airborne dust or fumes e.g. store hazardous chemicals in a fume cupboard.
- Provide advance notice to the workforce of any events like painting, pesticide application, floor waxing or carpet shampooing.
- If possible have cleaning and maintenance activities conducted when the building is not occupied to reduce employee exposure to irritants, or if this is not possible offer the option of flexible working practices such as home working. Some cleaning agents are sensitisers; consider this when selecting the products used in your buildings and talk to your supplier about this.
- Restrict employee access to high-risk areas and ensure employees wear personal protective clothing e.g. gloves and overalls and take regular breaks where necessary.

[1] and [2] HSE, COSHH : [hse.gov.uk](https://www.hse.gov.uk)

Conditions triggered by respiratory infections, climate and temperature

- Monitor sickness absence related to asthma separately from non-respiratory related sickness absence and consider making reasonable adjustments to attendance management systems. For more information about managing sickness absence and the law see our 'Managing sickness absence' briefing.
- Encourage employees to protect their health and to make enquiries with their medical adviser about steps to reduce the incidence of colds and respiratory infections.
- Regulate the temperature in the workplace and try to reduce draughts.
- Encourage employees to monitor environmental ozone levels and consider allowing home working on days when ozone levels are high^[3], if this is not already standard practice.
- Allow employees to wear scarves and extra clothing^[4] when working outdoors on cold days even if this is in conflict with your dress code.
- Consider adjusting your dress code for everyone if this not already standard practice.

[3] Asthma UK, Air pollution

[4] Asthma UK, Weather

Over-exertion or emotional stress

- Encourage employees to carry their reliever inhaler at all times and allow them to take their inhaler 5-10 minutes if they wish to before physical activity or a test or examination takes place.
- Give employees advance notice of when they will be expected to take part in tests or physical activity outside their normal duties.
- Consider reallocating minor duties that the employee finds aggravate their condition to other members of the team.
- Assess the employee's route to their work-station, taking into account distances to be walked and any flights of stairs to be climbed. Try to provide resting points on long routes and consider installing lifts for employees who find climbing stairs difficult to manage.
- Be alert to the risk of workplace stress and pressure for employees with asthma.

Asthma treatments

There are effective treatments that help people with asthma to control their symptoms. The two main kind of asthma treatment, called relievers and preventers, are commonly taken using an inhaler or using an aerosol-based inhaler taken with a spacer or mouth mask. Access to different treatments vary depending on which country the individual is located.

Relievers

Most people with asthma have a reliever inhaler. Relievers are treatments taken to relieve asthma symptoms. They quickly relax the muscles surrounding the constricted airways (within five to 10 minutes) making it easier to breathe again. Reliever inhalers are usually blue.

Frequent use of a reliever inhaler throughout the day can be a sign that asthma is not well controlled. People with asthma should have their treatment reviewed regularly by their health care professional.

Preventers

Preventers help to control swelling and inflammation in the airways and stop the airways from being as sensitive to triggers. They improve an individual's ability to control their asthma and reduce the likelihood of permanent damage to the airways. The protective effect builds up over time so it is important they are taken every day. Preventer inhalers are usually brown, red or orange.

Additional treatments

Some people also require additional medication to control their asthma. People with allergies such as hay fever may also take antihistamines and other medication.

A minority of people with asthma use a nebuliser machine, which creates a mist of treatment which is inhaled through a facemask. Recent research suggests that taking an inhaler through a spacer is more convenient and effective, portable and cost effective than the more cumbersome nebuliser which is now mainly only used for emergency asthma treatment in hospital.

When asthma is well controlled, regular exercise can be beneficial and actually help reduce symptoms[5].

[5] Asthma UK, Exercise and activities

What to do if an asthma attack happens

People with asthma are usually very capable of managing their own attacks and the key actions you will need to take are usually to assist the employee if required. The following simple first aid procedures may be useful:

- Keep calm and reassure the employee.
- Get the employee to take their usual dose of their reliever inhaler – this is the blue inhaler. Encourage them to breathe slowly and deeply.
- Ensure the person is sitting up to aid breathing, ideally leaning slightly forwards and supporting the upper body by placing their arms on their knees or on a firm surface like the back of a chair or a table.
- Loosen tight clothing.
- If there is no immediate improvement, encourage the person to continue to take one puff of reliever inhaler every minute for five minutes or until symptoms improve.

If you provide first aid training to your employees, ensure that their training includes what to do in case of an asthma attack. Ask the employee to advise you if they have any particular requirements.

Asthma UK recommends the following steps for the individual to follow, in case of an asthma attack^[6].

Employment adjustments for people with asthma

1. Sit up straight - don't lie down. Try to keep calm.
2. Take one puff of your reliever inhaler (usually blue) every 30-60 seconds, up to a maximum of 10 puffs.
3. If you feel worse at any point while you're using your inhaler or you don't feel better after 10 puffs or you're worried at any time, call for an ambulance.
4. If the ambulance is taking longer than 15 minutes you can repeat step 2.

The above is not designed for people on a SMART or MART regime^[7] who need to get the correct asthma attack information from their health care professional.

[6] Asthma UK, Asthma attacks

[7] Asthma UK, MART regime

Occupational asthma and work-aggravated asthma

Occupational asthma occurs when an individual works with a substance or substances which, if inhaled, can cause a respiratory condition to develop. Work-aggravated asthma occurs when the individual already has asthma and it worsens as a result of the work they do.

Occupational asthma can be prevented and work-aggravated asthma can be prevented by the removal or control of hazardous substances in the workplace, by carrying out health surveillance and prompt and effective intervention as soon as an employee starts to display symptoms or aggravated symptoms. Employers must be vigilant and swift to act on suspected cases. Any delay could result in an employee developing chronic occupational asthma and permanent lung deterioration.

When someone is sensitised to a workplace substance, the body sets off an immune reaction to the substance and any further exposure to it can bring an asthma attack. In some cases, the symptoms develop immediately after exposure, but for some people they will not appear until hours, weeks, months or even years after starting to work with the substance.

In the UK, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) estimates that each year there are 18,000 new cases of breathing or lung problems caused or made worse by work^[8].

Employment adjustments for people with asthma

To reduce the incidence of work-related asthma employers must identify and manage hazardous substances called 'sensitisers' in their workplace that could cause them. There are over 200 identified respiratory sensitisers that might cause asthma. The most common include:

- Dust from wood, flour or grain used in occupations such as carpentry, joinery, industrial baking, farm-work and grain transport.
- Glue and resins especially acid anhydride and amine hardening agents used in occupations involving work with adhesives, plastics, moulding resins, surface coatings.
- Glutaraldehyde (a biocide and chemical disinfectant), mainly used in the healthcare, offshore, papermaking and agricultural sectors.
- Isocyanates used in vehicle spray painting and foam making.
- Laboratory animals (air-borne proteins from the animal's fur or urine) used in research and educational activities.
- Dust from latex rubber often encountered in latex gloves used in laboratory work, nursing, care-work and dentistry.
- Solder/colophony found in soldering fumes used by the electronics industry.

The Health and Safety Executive provides advice and guidance on the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health on their website^[9].

Asthma can also be aggravated by inhaled exposures at work, even if these exposures have not caused the worker's asthma. Such exposures include temperature and humidity changes and exposures to dusts, gases, vapours and fumes.

[8] Health and Safety Executive

[9] Health and Safety Executive, Control of substances hazardous to health

Employment and people with asthma

Work-related respiratory conditions can have serious financial implications for both employers and employees.

It is estimated that 400,000 working days are lost each year due to work-related respiratory conditions^[10]. Respiratory conditions can affect people within a few weeks of exposure and as a lifelong condition, compensation payments could potentially involve loss of earnings spanning decades if someone loses their job.

Many people who have respiratory conditions will be protected under the Equality Act 2010 but will not consider themselves to be disabled. Nevertheless, employers have a legal obligation to make reasonable adjustments and not discriminate against employees who might be facing barriers at work because of a disability or health condition – even if it has not been diagnosed as a disability or accepted as such by the individual.

Employers should be aware that non-visible disabilities such as respiratory conditions mean that specific barriers can be less obvious. This means reasonable adjustments may be harder for employers to determine and put in place. Employers can refer to the HSE and Asthma UK workplace charter which contains five measures to reduce the impact of asthma in the workplace^[11].

There are also organisations which offer specialist advice and disability awareness training to help employers ensure that their recruitment process accounts for barriers faced by those with respiratory conditions.

[10] Go Home Healthy Campaign, Health and Safety Executive

[11] Asthma at work – your charter

Employment adjustments for people with asthma

It is important that employers have an honest conversation with new and existing employees about the barriers that may be present in the workplace and what simple measures might help. The best practice approach is to make adjustments for anyone who needs them in order to work effectively and contribute fully to your organisation. Employers can also seek occupational health advice to identify specific adjustments.

Most employers will want to know what is 'reasonable'. Doing what seems fair for the individual and others who work for you given the size and resources of your organisation is a good place to start.

This guidance will help you deliver best practice.

- You might need to treat people differently in order to treat them fairly.
- Don't make assumptions about what people can and can't do.
- Ensure that everyone knows who is responsible for doing what and when it must be done.
- Involve the individual in generating solutions and respect their right to confidentiality.

For more detail on the law and making reasonable adjustments contact Business Disability Forum's Advice Service on telephone number **+44-(0)-20-7403-3020** or by email **advice@businessdisabilityforum.org.uk** or see the briefing on The Equality Act 2010.

Reasonable adjustments and best practice

Where adjustments are needed they may well be simple and inexpensive and make good business sense.

Without adjustments, good candidates may not apply for jobs and good employees could be lost. Precise requirements vary from one individual to another. Always ask the person what they need.

Decisions about suitability for employment, promotion or retention are too often based on general assumptions or misconceptions, rather than a factual assessment. This can lead to discrimination against existing or potential employees.

Consider the skills, abilities and aspirations of each individual. Implement appropriate and reasonable support, including recommendations from occupational health teams when applicable, so that everyone can maximise their potential. This can have a positive effect on an organisation as it unlocks different ways of tackling problems and making decisions.

Recruitment and selection

Candidates with respiratory conditions may be prevented from demonstrating their abilities and full potential by conventional recruitment processes.

You need to make sure you do not discriminate against a disabled job applicant during the recruitment process. You may also have to make reasonable adjustments. It is important not to make assumptions about what the applicant can or cannot do; instead, ask applicants about reasonable adjustments they may require. If you use external recruitment agencies, ask for evidence that they make reasonable adjustments for disabled applicants and work to the standards that underpin this guidance.

Further information on best practice for recruitment and selection is also available from the Government's Disability Confident scheme; for further information, visit: disabilityconfident.campaign.gov.uk or contact **Business Disability Forum's Advice Service** on telephone number +44-(0)20-7403-3020 or by email advice@businessdisabilityforum.org.uk.

Remember it is unlawful to ask questions about health or a disability prior to job offer under the Equality Act 2010 unless the question relates directly to an intrinsic aspect of the role for which the person is applying, or is for the purpose of making reasonable adjustments to the application or interview process. Questions about disability can still be asked on equal opportunities monitoring forms provided this is not part of the assessment process.

Job descriptions

When drawing up job descriptions and candidate specifications:

- Be specific about what skills are needed, the nature of the working environment and what the job involves. For example refer to requirements to work outside in all weathers, to work with dogs or to carry weights up to 10 kg.
- Be flexible. Very often minor changes can make a significant difference
- Do not needlessly exclude a candidate with a respiratory condition. Concentrate on what is to be achieved in a job rather than on how it is achieved, e.g. stating "candidates must be able to work onsite at all times" in a role which could accommodate flexible working practices may exclude an excellent candidate whose asthma may require them to work flexibly or occasionally work from home.

Advertising and attracting applicants

When advertising a job:

- Use positive wording like "we welcome disabled applicants" or for BDF Members: "We are a Member of Business Disability Forum and committed to becoming a disability-smart employer".
- Provide a point of contact for people who are concerned about the recruitment process.
- Display or mention the Disability Confident symbol if have signed up to the scheme.
- Be clear that you are willing to make reasonable adjustments.
- Consult your local Jobcentre Plus which can help you make your recruitment process accessible. As well as advising on your recruitment process, Work Coaches and Disability Employment Advisers at Jobcentre Plus will also know of individuals with asthma who may be suitable candidates. Business Disability Forum Members and Partners can contact us for help.

Application forms

Adjustments may need to be made to the shortlisting process because an applicant may:

- Apply for a job for which they are over qualified because they need to regain confidence.
- Have gaps in their CV due to their disability.
- Have gained experience outside of paid employment, e.g. work experience and voluntary work.

Interviews, tests and assessment centres

Ensure that candidates with respiratory conditions are able to demonstrate their ability to do the job and show what they can contribute to your organisation. Focus on the person's abilities not on the person's respiratory condition. If you have any doubts about a person's ability to do an intrinsic function of the job simply ask how they would do it.

When you invite applicants for an interview make sure you ask all candidates if they require any adjustments to be made for the interview. With adjustments, the interview allows you to assess the ability of candidates with respiratory conditions:

- Consider how the candidate will reach the interview venue. If public transport could prove difficult, offer to reimburse the taxi fare or provide car parking.
- Ensure that your interview is held in accessible locations, e.g. on the ground floor or in a room accessed by a lift. Remember that some people's symptoms can be triggered by exercise and that they may struggle to climb flights of stairs to get to an interview.

Employment adjustments for people with asthma

- Be aware that stress is a common trigger for asthma attacks – be prepared to allow the candidate a break if the interview or assessment exercise causes them to experience asthma symptoms. Remember that this is not any indication they will continue to experience frequent attacks if offered the post.
- Manage any potential triggers in the workplace setting, e.g. ensuring as far as possible that the candidate is not exposed to pollen, chemicals or dust in the reception areas, interview room and routes through the building.

If selection normally involves a test, be sure that it does not discriminate against someone with respiratory conditions. For example warn the candidate in advance about any physical exertion required. Allow the candidate to use their inhaler five to ten minutes before they begin the task should they wish to and provide some time to warm-up.

Post job-offer

Once someone has been offered a job you may need to put in adjustments to ensure they can perform to their highest capability.

Start getting the adjustments in place as soon as practicable after you have made a job offer – it may take time to set up reasonable adjustments and, in some instances, to secure Access to Work funding and, when required, to seek occupational health advice. Consult the individual and make sure the employee's manager or supervisor understands the agreed adjustments. Disability awareness training can be useful for the candidate's team but only if the individual is comfortable with this.

Building in regular reviews of adjustments, for example at the end of the probationary period, in supervision sessions and appraisals will help ensure that the adjustments are still effective.

Ensure that you take the same approach to adjustments when someone with asthma applies for promotion, again not making assumptions about what the employee can or cannot do.

To see an example of a tailored adjustment plan and to download a template, visit Business Disability Forum's website at **businessdisabilityforum.org.uk** or contact Business Disability Forum's Advice Service on telephone number **+44-(0)-20-7403-3020** or by email **advice@businessdisabilityforum.org.uk**.

Working arrangements to retain employees

It is very important to involve the individual concerned when considering making any adjustment. Consider when you are assessing the need for adjustments:

- Is the individual's asthma well controlled?
- What symptoms are associated with the individual's condition? For example, coughing, difficulty breathing, wheezing, fatigue, dizziness, etc.
- How is the individual's ability to do their job affected by their condition? For example, high sickness absence, reduced ability to concentrate, inability to be in a particular work environment.
- What are the known triggers that exacerbate the individual's condition?
- How can these known triggers be managed in the working environment?
- Are there any other adjustments that will enable the individual to do their job?

Employment adjustments for people with asthma

Manage workloads in such a way to reduce the pressure on individuals as stress is a common trigger for asthma attacks.

If someone has asthma:

- What are the frequency and duration of asthma attacks?
- Is there any specific care that should be given either during or after an asthma attack?
- Ensure access to appropriate medications.
- Ensure other workers know what to do during an attack.
- Ensure time off for health care appointments are scheduled.

Steps to help prevent exposure to hazardous substances include:

- Assess the risks and decide what precautions are needed.
- Prevent exposure.
- If possible, eliminate dangerous substances from the workplace, change the process or activity so that the hazardous substance is no longer required or generated; or replace the hazardous substance with a safe alternative.
- Adequately control exposure. If it is not possible to eliminate a hazardous substance take measures to reduce an employee's exposure to it, by providing ventilation or removing the employee from contact with the hazard.

Employment adjustments for people with asthma

- Monitor the effectiveness of your systems to prevent or control exposure.
- Have regular health surveillance carried out if respiratory sensitisers are necessary to a place of work^[12].
- Provide information for employees on how to recognise the early signs of occupational asthma.

[12] Employers can refer to the HSE guidance on health surveillance for more information

Support the employee in managing their condition

Asthma is a long-term conditions and needs to be reviewed on an individual basis; employees should visit their healthcare professional to review their symptoms and the medication they are taking.

Be aware that employees with asthma may monitor their condition by keeping a peak flow diary measuring how quickly they can blow air out of their lungs using a piece of equipment called a peak flow meter. Encourage employees to advise you if they suspect their condition is deteriorating.

While you cannot insist that an employee with asthma gives up smoking you can offer assistance in helping employees who have made the decision to quit and need additional support.

Although exercise can be a trigger for some, regular exercise help with lung function and breathing for those who can. Try to encourage employees to adopt healthy lifestyles.

Induction, training and development

Disability and the need to make adjustments should be embedded in all policies, e.g. policies on sickness, training, and appraisals.

New recruits should be made aware of these policies during the induction procedure. It is important that your standard induction and training programmes are accessible, so that employees with respiratory conditions have the same information.

- Allow flexibility for induction and training activities and take care to ensure induction and orientation activities are held in accessible venues with minimum exposure to the candidate's known triggers.
- Ensure employees with respiratory conditions have equal access to further in-house and external training, meetings and career development opportunities.
- Ensure all employees have an understanding of your Control of substances hazardous to health (COSHH) policy and are alert to the warning signs of work related respiratory conditions.

Health and safety

Most people with respiratory conditions pose no greater risk in terms of health and safety than any other employee.

In limited circumstances it may be necessary to conduct an individual risk assessment. This risk assessment will help to determine whether the individual's respiratory condition presents any increased risks either to themselves or others. Such assessments must always be specific to the particular individual, job-role and working environment.

- Ensure that everyone knows who is responsible for doing what and when it must be done.
- Involve the individual in generating solutions and respect their right to confidentiality.

Where substances known to have links with work-related respiratory conditions are used at work, employers are required under COSHH regulations to have a programme of health surveillance to ensure potential cases of occupational asthma are identified and treated quickly and effectively. Employers can refer to the HSE guidance on health surveillance for more information^[13].

Workers with pre-existing conditions should also have more frequent monitoring to detect and prevent any deterioration in lung function.

[13] HSE, Health surveillance

Occupational asthma and redeployment

In some circumstances where an employee has developed or is at risk of a respiratory condition related to a workplace substance it will be necessary to protect the employee from any further contact with the substance by redeploying them to another post.

When all possible reasonable adjustments have been considered, if an employee is unable to perform the core duties of their existing role for reasons related to a disability, the employer should consider redeployment. Transferring the person to fill an existing vacancy can be a reasonable adjustment.

If an employee needs to be redeployed they should be transferred to a suitable alternative vacancy. Giving employees internal vacancy bulletins and requiring them to apply and compete for posts is not sufficient.

When redeploying an employee with work-related respiratory conditions you should be proactive in seeking alternative positions for the employee.

Employment adjustments for people with asthma

Adopting a coordinated case management approach, overseen by a disability management coordinator, will be helpful in ensuring a collaborative approach to redeployment:

- Work closely with the individual with work-related respiratory conditions through the assessment, decision making and review process.
- Protect the individual's rights, ensuring confidentiality and explaining these to the individual.
- Manage assessment and the commission of specialist advice, e.g. from an occupational health specialist where needed.
- Conduct a skills assessment of the employee to include the skills they have acquired in their existing role, the skills they may have acquired outside work, transferable skills and training needs.
- Review the organisation as a whole and identify any current suitable vacancies, vacancies that might be suitable with reasonable adjustments, vacancies that might be suitable if training were provided and vacancies that might arise in the foreseeable future.

Remember that only the employer knows the needs of the organisation and so only the employer can identify suitable vacancies. You should not put the onus on the employee to identify suitable jobs or vacancies.

Harassment

A person who has a respiratory condition may be vulnerable to harassment from their colleagues.

As an employer, you must take all reasonable steps to deal with harassment. Harassment includes not only physical or verbal abuse but also anything which violates a person's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading humiliating or offensive environment.

Harassment stems from stereotyping, lack of understanding, intolerance of difference and fear. To prevent bullying and harassment of anyone you should:

- Ensure your organisation has clear policies on workplace bullying and harassment and that complaints are investigated promptly and effectively. Ensure these policies are communicated across the organisation through campaigns and awareness raising initiatives.
- Make it clear that any harassment, including on grounds of disability, will not be tolerated and that offenders will be dealt with through your disciplinary procedures.
- Ensure management understands that people who have respiratory conditions experience increased risk of harassment, and provide training for line managers to help them to identify and manage incidents connected to bullying and harassment in the workplace.
- Make the employee aware of their right to equal treatment, their entitlement to make a complaint and to initiate a grievance.
- Allow employees access to support networks internally or externally from work. If possible ensure employees who have experienced bullying or harassment have access to professional and confidential counselling.

Further sources of reference

Useful organisations

Business Disability Forum

Nutmeg House, 60 Gainsford Street,
London SE1 2NY

Tel: +44-(0)20-7403-3020

Website: businessdisabilityforum.org.uk

Business Disability Forum (BDF) is a not-for-profit membership organisation that supports businesses to recruit and retain disabled employees and serve disabled customers.

Business Disability Forum provides pragmatic support, expertise, advice, training and networking opportunities between businesses. Our aim is to transform the life chances – and experience – of disabled people as employees and consumers.

Health and Safety Executive

Health and Safety Executive does not operate a telephone helpline.

Website: hse.gov.uk

The UK's national regulator for workplace health and safety.

Asthma UK

18 Mansell Street,
London, E1 8AA

Tel: +44-(0)300-222-5800

Email: info@asthma.org.uk

Website: asthma.org.uk

Asthma UK is a charity working to stop asthma attacks and conducting research to cure asthma.

British Lung Foundation

73-75 Goswell Road,
London EC1V 7ER

Tel: +44-(0)300-003-0555

Website: blf.org.uk

Charity promoting lung health and support those affected by lung disease.

© 2018 This publication and the information contained therein are subject to copyright and remain the property of Business Disability Forum. They are for reference only and must not be reproduced, copied or distributed without prior permission.

Business Disability Forum is committed to ensuring that all its products and services are as accessible as possible to everyone. If you wish to discuss anything with regard to accessibility, please contact us.

**Company limited by guarantee with charitable objects.
Registered Charity No: 1018463.
Registered in England No: 2603700.**



Contact us

Business Disability Forum
Nutmeg House
60 Gainsford Street
London
SE1 2NY

Tel: +44-(0)20-7403-3020

Fax: +44-(0)20-7403-0404

Email: enquiries@businessdisabilityforum.org.uk

Web: businessdisabilityforum.org.uk