MetLife | Return to Health

Opioid use in the workplace

Pain from work-related injuries, including from jobs that are heavy or strenuous in nature, can lead to opioid misuse or abuse.



According to the SAMHSA, in 2021, **9.2 million** people 12 and older misused opioids in the past year.[1] In addition, **32%** of workers' compensation claims had at least one prescription for opioids.[6]

Did you know?

- Employees with a substance use disorder miss an average of **14.8 days** while those with a pain medication use disorder miss an average of **29 days** per year.[3]
- **43%** of drug overdose deaths at work occurred in three industries: transportation and warehousing, construction, healthcare and social assistance.[4]
- Musculoskeletal (MSK) conditions make up **34%** of the lost work time cases in manufacturing and **77%** in construction. MSK injuries are also linked with use of prescription pain medication.[5]

Signs and symptoms:

- Drowsiness
- Fatigue
- Impaired focus and concentration
- Nausea and vomiting
- Lethargy

These symptoms can put employees at risk for accidents, impact ability to complete safety-sensitive tasks, and increase incidence of workers compensation claims.

75%

of employers report having been affected in some way by employee opioid use.[2]

38%

of those employers report experiencing impacts related to absenteeism or impaired worker performance.[2]

How employers can help:



Assess for occupational risk to reduce or prevent injury.



Permit flexible start times to allow for physical therapy; and medications to reach therapeutic dose prior to work.



Allow job modifications to avoid exacerbation of existing injuries.



Provide information regarding alternative pain management resources, such as EAP, wellness initiatives, cognitive behavior therapy, etc.

1. https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2023/01/04/samhsa-announces-national-survey-drug-use-health-results-detailing-mental-illness-substance-use-levels-2021.html https://www.nsc.org/work-safety/safety-topics/drugs-at-work
2. Gopelrud E., Hodge S, Benham T.A Substance Use Cost Calculator for US Employers With and Emphasis on Prescription Pain Medication Misuse. Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine. 2017;59(11):1063-1071.
3. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5 671784 /external icon
4. Iesman HM, Konda S. Cimineri L, et al. Drug overdose deaths at work, 2011-2016. Injury Prevention Published Online First: 10 April 2019. Doi:10.1136/injuryprev-2018-043104
5. National Council on Compensation Insurance. (2022). https://tools.niehs.nih.gov/wetp/public/hasigetblob.cfm?ID=1158

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