Citation

# People and premises:

## A comprehensive approach to Health & Safety in care settings

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Health & Safety is at the heart of effective care home management. It's more than a legal requirement; it's a commitment to safeguarding the wellbeing of everyone who comes into the building – staff, service users and visitors alike.

Creating a culture of safety is about more than compliance – it's about fostering trust, reducing risks and building a foundation for a foundation for outstanding care. Staff need to feel confident performing their roles, service users need to feel secure and families need to be reassured that their loved ones are in safe hands, and achieving this relies on recognising the interconnectedness of people and place, making sure that every safety measure supports both individuals and the care home infrastructure.

## 1. Environmental factors
creating and maintaining a safe space

A care home's environment plays a big role in making sure everyone is safe, comfortable and healthy – including both service users and staff. Maintaining a well-cared for, well-designed space can reduce risks and provide a supportive setting for everyday activities, so let's explore key areas where environmental factors impact Health & Safety, and practical steps to improve these spaces.

### Indoor environment

#### Ventilation

Proper ventilation is vital for reducing the risks of airborne illnesses and improving overall air quality. Making sure rooms have a proper flow of fresh air – either through natural ventilation like windows or mechanical systems – is crucial. Schedule regular HVAC maintenance to make sure your systems don't break down and compromise air quality.

#### Temperature control

Service users might be more vulnerable to the extremes of heat or cold, so consistent, comfortable temperatures is a big consideration. Put thermostats in communal areas and make sure you regularly monitor heating and cooling systems for reliability, and you could use individual room controls to cater for different needs when it comes to temperature sensitivities.

#### Lighting

Good lighting is more than a comfort thing – it prevents accidents by improving visibility, especially in high-risk areas like stairs. Think about trying to use natural light where you can, and keeping the lighting balanced to reduce glares or overly dark areas. Motion-sensor lighting could be a useful safety addition in areas that aren't used as much like storage rooms. Don't forget that you also need to make sure emergency lighting is installed and regularly maintained and tested. Make sure units are put in important locations, so if the power does go out, you can still safely look after service users or evacuate them if power is lost during a fire.

## Outdoor access

It's been proven that outdoor spaces are really important for physical activity, social interaction and mental wellbeing – but these spaces need to be safe and accessible for all service users.

### Safe outdoor spaces

Design outdoor spaces with mobility in mind, especially for service users who might use wheelchairs, walkers or other mobility aids. Paths and walkways need to be kept level, slip-resistant and free of obstacles. Install handrails and proper seating areas to give more support and comfort to those with less mobility.

### Hazard management

Outdoor areas need to be inspected regularly to make sure there aren't any potential hazards like loose paving stones, overgrown plants or icy patches in the colder months. Put a proper schedule in place for these checks to make sure they get addressed quickly, and make sure routines like grit and snow removal are in place ahead of winter to avoid any last-minute scrambles.

## Cleanliness and hygiene

There's a big focus on infection prevention control (IPC) in social care, and that's why it's so important that you can prove you're meeting all the right standards – and according to our own analysis of inspection reports, IPC continues to be one of the top areas the CQC is looking at during their inspections. Hygiene is vital in good IPC, so you'll need proactive sanitation measures to help guard against health risks.

### Sanitation protocols

Put a clear cleaning and disinfection schedule in place, concentrating specifically on high-touch surfaces like door handles, dining tables and shared equipment. Using personal protective equipment (PPE) when handling cleaning substances is important to prevent staff exposure to harmful chemicals – but more on COSHH later. Training staff properly on these routines makes sure that everyone knows what their role is in keeping up a clean environment.

### Risk hotspots

Identify areas that have the highest potential for lapses in hygiene, like communal bathrooms, kitchens and laundry rooms. Develop specific cleaning checklists for each space, making sure each step is properly carried out and nothing is overlooked. It's a good idea to regularly inspect and document these areas and address any concerns identified.

# 2. Risk assessment as the foundation of safety

Risk assessments are the backbone of Health & Safety management in care settings – and identifying hazards and reducing their risk is the best way to create an environment where everyone is safe and healthy. Not to mention they're a legal necessity, and you'll need to show evidence of risk assessments when it comes to inspection.

## The risk assessment process – five steps you need to take

### 1. Identify the hazards

Begin by taking a thorough look at every part of your care setting. What could cause harm? Slippery floors, uneven walkways or badly stored items could come into this category. Include your staff in this process, because they're often the first to spot any potential dangers. Review past incident logs, maintenance records and your accident book to find any recurring issues or historical risks.

### 2. Assess who's at risk

Identify the individuals or groups who might be affected by each hazard. This goes beyond service users and staff to include visitors, contractors and anyone else on your site. It's important to consider the specific needs of your service users, especially anyone with mobility challenges, as they might need extra precautions.

### 3. Evaluate risks and set priorities

Once hazards have been identified, evaluate the likelihood and potential severity of the harm. For example, the risk of a fall on a badly lit staircase might rank higher than the risk of minor storage issues. Use this to allocate resources effectively, and introduce control measures like handrails, additional lighting or staff training to reduce high-risk hazards.

### 4. Record your findings

Documenting your risk assessments is essential, especially for meeting legal obligations under Health & Safety regulations. Your report should include the hazards you've identified, who's at risk, the implemented control measures and any outstanding actions. This document will be used as evidence during inspections or audits, showing your commitment to safety.

### 5. Review and update findings

Risk assessments are living documents that evolve with your care setting's circumstances. Review them after any significant changes, like new equipment installations, updates to regulations or incidents that bring new risks to the forefront. For example, a new resident with mobility needs might require revisions to your moving and handling risk assessment.

## Practical tips for risk assessment success

**Create a "see it, action it" culture** – encourage staff to report and address hazards as soon as they spot them. This collaborative approach helps everyone stay vigilant and makes sure risks are addressed quickly, even between formal assessments. Risk assessments and control measures also need to be communicated out to workers, and we'd recommend asking your workers to sign off on them to show they've understood them.

**Schedule routine reviews** – it's still very important to review your assessments at set points, so set reminders to do it. You could schedule quarterly reviews or additional updates during seasonal changes like winter, when icy weather could increase outdoor risks.

**Think about professional support** – risk assessments should be carried out by a competent person – if you're in doubt about any of your risks or how to assess them, think about bringing in Health & Safety professionals who can guide you on the more complex assessments. They can provide valuable insights for higher risks like fire safety or chemical handling.

# 3. Fire safety
## protecting lives and building confidence

Effective fire safety measures in care homes are essential to protecting lives, building confidence and complying with legal regulations. With vulnerable service users and more complex premises to think about, fire prevention and being ready for emergency has to be prioritised.

## Prevention strategies

Proactive fire prevention is your first line of defence. You'll drastically reduce the likelihood of fires if you identify the risks and put robust controls in place, and the key elements of this include:

### Fire risk assessments

It's vital that you get a competent person to carry out a fire risk assessment, and any findings have to be addressed promptly. You also need to keep them up to date with any changes in the environment or legislation.

### Fire detection and prevention equipment

Install and regularly inspect fire alarms, smoke detectors and sprinkler systems, and make sure you maintain fire extinguishers. You should have a maintenance contract in place to make sure they're serviced at the right intervals. They should also be accessible and the right kind of fire extinguishers for the types of fire that could occur. For example, kitchens might need specialised extinguishers for grease fires, while communal areas might need multi-purpose ones.

### Storage and handling of hazardous substances

You should reduce chemicals on site to a minimum and pick the least hazardous options, but any chemicals or other flammable substances should be stored safely and away from ignition sources. Make sure all staff are trained in the safe handling of materials like this, reducing the risk of accidental fires.

### Fire doors

Fire doors, while they don't stop fires, do delay the spread of fire until emergency services can intervene. It's vital that you've got proper fire doors in place and that they're inspected at the right intervals, as you might find yourself in a situation where a service user cannot be evacuated or moved - and fire doors are crucial in these situations.

## Addressing resident safety challenges

The safety of residents, especially those with mobility or cognitive impairments, needs to be central to your fire safety planning.

### Emergency evacuation plans

Develop and communicate clear evacuation procedures tailored to your care setting's layout and service user needs. Make sure escape routes are always unobstructed, clearly marked and suitable for wheelchairs or other mobility aids. Emergency doors need to be easy to open, and proper emergency lighting is needed to show escape pathways. These plans need to be reviewed regularly and drilled.

### Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs)

A Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan should be in place for any residents needing help. These plans show in detail how an individual will be evacuated, who's responsible for their assistance and what equipment might be needed.

## Meeting points and accountability

Designate a safe, easily accessible meeting point outside the premises. Put a system in place to account for all residents, staff and visitors during an evacuation. This makes sure that no one is left behind.

## Staff training and emergency preparedness

Proper training and regular drills turn fire safety protocols into habits – so all staff need to understand their roles in fire prevention and emergency response.

## Training programmes for prevention

Train staff to recognise fire risks and address them quickly. This includes identifying any faulty equipment, following storage guidelines for hazardous substances, and using fire prevention equipment properly. Training should be revisited regularly to keep safety front and centre.

## Emergency drills

Carry out practice fire drills at least twice a year to make sure everyone knows what to do in the event of an emergency. These drills should simulate different scenarios, like fires in different areas of the building, to prepare staff for potential challenges.

## Equipment use

Staff need to be trained to use fire extinguishers and other emergency equipment confidently. Regular inspections of this equipment are vital to make sure it's ready to use whenever needed, and that it works properly when it is needed.

# 4. Manual handling
## protecting staff and residents

In a care setting, manual handling is a day-to-day aspect of operations – whether it's helping service users with mobility, lifting equipment, or handling supplies. But, without proper practices in place, manual handling can lead to injuries, especially musculoskeletal (MSK) disorders. MSK injuries make up 32% of all work-related ill health cases, and have resulted in 7.8 million lost working days – so putting in the work to prevent these sorts of injuries is worth it. And, there's a risk that the comfort and dignity of your service users might be compromised if your manual handling practices are unsafe.

### Common manual handling injuries and their impact

Common injuries can include back strain, shoulder injuries and MSK disorders, which often come from lifting or repositioning service users without proper support or techniques. Injuries like this lead to physical pain and long-term health issues, but also contribute to increased absenteeism and reduced morale within care teams, and the physical demands of manual handling tasks exacerbate these risks.

### Training staff on proper techniques

Proper training gives your staff the skills to handle tasks safely and confidently. Key areas to include in your manual handling training are:

**Understanding the risks** – educate your staff on the potential injuries that could come from bad manual handling techniques – awareness is the first step in prevention, after all.

**Safe lifting techniques** – demonstrate and practise proper lifting postures, and teach staff how to work together effectively for team lifts.

**Service user handling methods** – provide specialist training for assisting service users. Make sure you include communication and consent as steps to make sure service users feel involved and autonomous.

**Refresher courses** – manual handling training shouldn't be a one-off, so make sure you're doing regular refresher courses to keep everyone up to date on techniques and regulations.

### Guidelines for assessing manual handling tasks

It's important to assess each manual handling task thoroughly to make sure you're managing the risks properly.

**Identify high-risk activities** – common activities like lifting residents, moving furniture or transferring medical equipment should be evaluated for potential hazards. Tasks that involve awkward postures, heavy loads or repetitive movements are particularly high risk. Where it's possible, manual handling should be eliminated from a task – for instance, if people are having to reach for commonly used items, rearrange the workplace so they don't need to.

**Assess environmental factors** – evaluate the environment where tasks are carried out. Cramped spaces, slippery floors or poorly positioned furniture can increase the difficulty and danger of manual handling.

**Consider individual needs** – for tasks involving service users, think about their specific mobility needs and physical condition. A tailored approach makes sure everyone stays safe and dignified, and reduces discomfort during transfers or repositioning.

As with all other risk assessments, remember that they're live documents that need to be reviewed regularly, and updated whenever something changes.

# 5. Stress management
## caring for those who care

In the care sector, work-related stress is a big problem. Emotional and physical demands on staff are intense, so proper stress management is key to protecting the wellbeing of your employees and fostering a positive work environment. It also reduces absenteeism and improves the quality of care given to service users.

Stress can happen when people feel overwhelmed by excessive demand, and it can lead to emotional, mental and even physical health issues. In care settings, common triggers might include high workloads, staff shortages, emotionally challenging scenarios and a lack of control over tasks. Left unchecked, stress can result in burnout, increased absenteeism and presenteeism, having a big impact on the efficiency and morale of your team.

**Did you know...**

Nearly one in six employees in the social and health care sectors report feeling stressed every day*

### The impact of stress on Health & Safety

While stress might seem more like an HR issue on the surface, it can have an impact on the Health & Safety standards at your care setting. Here's just a few ways this could happen:

**Burnout and fatigue** – chronic stress can lead to burnout, leaving care workers emotionally and physically drained. Fatigued staff are more likely to overlook safety protocols or make mistakes in performing important or urgent tasks, like giving medications or responding to emergencies.

**Reduced focus and awareness** – high levels of stress can get in the way of cognitive functions like focus and decision-making. This could cause lapses in judgment or slower response times during high-pressure situations, increasing the likelihood of accidents and near-misses.

**Compromised teamwork** – a stressed workforce might mean strained relationships between team members. Poor communication and reduced collaboration might get in the way of smooth operations and care provision, especially in situations that need coordinated efforts.

As you can see, addressing stress is vital for the health and wellbeing for everyone in your setting – and not to mention it's a legal obligation as part of your Health & Safety duties, as outlined in a few different pieces of legislation...

- **The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999** requires employers to assess the risk of stress-related ill health caused by work activity
- **The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974** mandates the implementation of measures to control workplace stress risks
- **The Equality Act 2010** recognises stress-related conditions that have a substantial and long-term effect on daily activities as a possible disability

## Carrying out a stress risk assessment

Stress risk assessments are the foundation of effective stress management, and it's a legal responsibility to carry one out. Here's how:

### 1. Identify potential stressors

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have developed six Management Standards, which put sources of stress into groups to help employers identify where the stress risks in their business might be - so use these to find common stressors.

**Demands** – this includes issues like workload, including tight deadlines, work patterns and the work environment.

**Control** – how much say someone has in the way they do their work.

**Support** – this includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.

**Relationships** – does your business promote positive working to avoid conflict? And how effectively do you deal with unacceptable behaviour?

**Role** – do people understand their role within your business?

**Change** – how do you organisational change? Do you communicate and manage this effectively with your people?

### 2. Assess who might be affected

Think about the individual circumstances of team members – for example, do your newer staff need more support? Do your more long-standing employees face other challenges like burnout?

### 3. Consult staff

Speak directly to staff to understand their experiences and feelings – this doesn't just help identify stressors, but also will help them feel included and supported.

### 4. Record the findings

For care businesses with five or more employees, it's a legal requirement to document your stress risk assessment and any actions taken to address risks – but it's good practice to write it down anyway.

### 5. Implement control measures

Take proactive steps to reduce risks. This could include adjusting workloads, providing more training, improving communication or offering health and wellbeing resources.

### 6. Review and update regularly

Remember, like your usual risk assessments, your stress one is also a live document. Reassess it regularly or in response to big changes like organisational restructures or increased service user needs.

## Supporting staff and building resilience

A culture of support can go a long way in protecting your staff from stress, so here's a few things you could do to foster a positive work environment:

**Provide manager training** – make sure managers know how to recognise the signs of stress, like mood swings, absenteeism or changes in behaviour, and know how to offer support.

**Establish open communication** – make opportunities for employees to share concerns without fear of judgement. Regular one-to-one meetings or anonymous feedback channels can encourage openness.

**Encourage work/life balance** – support flexible work options where you can and try to avoid excessive overtime to promote a healthier work/life balance.

**Promote mental health awareness** – offer resources on coping strategies and make sure staff know how to get counselling or occupational health services.

**Facilitate phased returns** – for employees returning to work after stress-related absences, try and give them a phased reintroduction to their duties, helping them adjust at a manageable pace.

# 6. COSHH
## managing chemical and pharmaceutical

The likelihood that there'll be some hazardous substances in your care setting is pretty high, with cleaning, maintenance and service user care going on every day. The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations mandate that businesses have to assess and manage the risks of hazardous substances to keep everyone safe.

If they're not properly managed, hazardous substances can pose big risks, including respiratory issues, skin irritation and long-term health conditions like asthma or cancer. These risks are especially important in care settings, where vulnerable residents might be more susceptible to harmful exposure. Effective COSHH management doesn't just make sure you're compliant with legal requirements, but it creates a safer, healthier environment for everyone.

Approaching COSHH assessments is much the same as your other risk assessments – but with a few extra considerations.

- You'll need to make an inventory of all substances in use, including those that might be produced as part of a process like fumes or dust. For detailed information on the nature and risks of each substance, check for red and white diamond-shaped hazard labels or check the Safety Data Sheet (SDS) provided by manufacturers.
- Personal protective equipment (PPE) will be vital when it comes to reducing the risks associated with some hazardous substances. As an employer, you have to provide PPE and make sure it fits properly and that your staff know how to use it.
- The substance's form, the extent and frequency of exposure and the methods it could enter the body are important to think about when it comes to assessing the harm.
- Think about the hierarchy of control – you should try and eliminate first, then substitute, then use engineering controls, then administrative controls and only then should you consider PPE – almost like a last resort.
- Make sure your people have ongoing training when it comes to COSHH, and they're familiar with safe handling techniques.

# 7. Training
## empowering the frontline of care

Ongoing training is the backbone of a safe, efficient and supportive care home environment. For care homes to meet the complex needs of service users while making sure everyone stays safe, comprehensive and regular training is non-negotiable. Putting targeted learning and development initiatives in place means care teams can handle daily challenges, keep up with Health & Safety standards and build a culture of excellence.

### The role of ongoing training in better Health & Safety outcomes

Well-trained staff are essential for achieving positive Health & Safety outcomes – they're better equipped to prevent accidents, identify potential hazards and respond effectively during emergencies. For example, a staff member trained extensively in manual handling techniques is less likely to get injured, which means not only they stay safe, but so do residents during lifts or transfers.

Consistent training means that staff stay up to date with adjustments in regulations, procedures and technology. This proactive approach builds a workplace culture where safety is a shared responsibility, with every individual understanding and valuing their role in reducing risks.

### Is your training easily accessible and understandable?

For training to be successful, it needs to be accessible and digestible for everyone. Care staff often have diverse backgrounds with different levels of experience and language proficiencies, so find training that simplifies Health & Safety concepts into clear, straightforward materials. Visual aids, simple language and real-world examples can break down knowledge into practical steps that staff can actually use. Think about trying to provide training in different languages as well.

Flexible delivery methods like online modules and bitesize in-house sessions can help your training stay accessible, especially for shift workers. The goal is to make sure no one gets left behind and your team stays cohesive and well-informed.

### Tailored training for different roles

A one-size-fits-all approach won't meet the unique needs of different staff in your care setting. Care assistants, kitchen staff, maintenance personnel and managers each have different challenges and responsibilities in their daily roles which might need bespoke training to suit them.

For instance, a care assistant might need more intensive guidance on infection control and personal care, while a maintenance person might benefit more from sessions focused on COSHH management and equipment safety. Managers, on the other hand, might need leadership training including stress management and supporting team welfare.  Tailoring training like this means every role is prepared to contribute to overall safety and operational success.

### Creative approaches to training: keeping it engaging

Keeping training engaging and interesting can be a bit of a challenge, so creativity is key. Traditional methods like lectures might feel time-consuming and overwhelming, especially in such a hands-on industry. So, innovative approaches like workshops and simulations can transform training into a more interactive, meaningful experience.

For example, scenario based learning puts staff in realistic, practical situations where they can apply their knowledge directly, such as handling a fire evacuation or communicating during a medical emergency. Hands-on sessions for manual handling or operation of lifting equipment mean staff can learn by doing, bridging the gap between theory and practice.

# 8. Embedding a Health & Safety culture beyond compliance

Health & Safety in care settings isn't just about ticking boxes or adhering to regulations – it's about creating a culture where safety is a shared value woven into the fabric of everyday operations. When care settings move beyond basic compliance towards embedding a robust, safety-first culture, the long-term benefits can be huge. From reducing incidents to improving overall morale and service user wellbeing, a strong Health & Safety culture sets the foundation for a thriving care environment.

## Why does culture matter?

A safety-first culture means Health & Safety becomes second nature rather than just your legal responsibilities. This mindset drives engagement, accountability and consistency across teams, and when safety is prioritised, staff feel more supported and service users benefit from a more secure environment. Over time, this builds trust, reduces turnover and lowers the rates of workplace injuries or errors in resident care.

One of the most effective ways to embed a safety culture is by actively involving staff in the process. Frontline workers have a unique understanding of the day-to-day challenges in care settings, making their input the best you can have. Get your staff involved in shaping safety procedures, whether that's through regular planning meetings, brainstorming sessions or surveys, makes sure you get the most practical solutions and strengthens their sense of ownership and responsibility. For example, you could set up a staff-led safety committee to review procedures, highlight risks and propose improvements, or engage kitchen teams in discussions about food hygiene practices.

Communication is the centre of a strong Health & Safety culture – so encourage open dialogue about safety concerns, near-miss accidents and potential hazards to reduce fear of blame and increase proactivity. Regular opportunities for staff to share their thoughts means you can keep safety issues at the top of the mind – but make sure you have anonymous suggestion systems in place.

Feedback loops further solidify this culture. When staff report potential risks, responding quickly and sharing the outcome shows that every voice matters. For example, if a worker spots a broken handrail and the management team resolves it and updates everyone on the action taken, it closes the loop and demonstrates that reporting really does make a difference. Think about implementing recognition methods for employee contributions to safety improvements to increase motivation, and show that leadership values the efforts and commitment of their people.

# Your Health & Safety checklist

Having all the right measures in place can be a minefield – so use this checklist to make sure you're ticking your boxes so you're ready for inspection.

- [ ] Make sure you have comprehensive risk assessments in place for employees and people in your care.
- [ ] Check you have an up-to-date fire risk assessment in place, and that your fire equipment is regularly checked and trained employees know how to use it.
- [ ] Report and investigate accidents, incidents and concerns in an open and transparent way.
- [ ] Ensure appropriate assistive technology, aids and other equipment are available and fitted, so that people can live as independently as possible.
- [ ] Make sure all employees receive training and understand basic Health & Safety issues – including fire safety, moving and handling and basic life support.
- [ ] Put contingency plans in place in case of an unforeseeable event, like a fire, flood, gas leak or lack of water supply.
- [ ] Regularly check and maintain all equipment and services.
- [ ] Ensure you have robust safeguarding systems in place to protect people from abuse, neglect, discrimination, harassment and breaches of dignity and respect.
- [ ] Prevent and control infections to ensure people in your care are protected.

# How can Citation help you achieve this?

If you want to be recognised as an employer that works hard to create a legally compliant, safe and happy workforce, we're here to help you do just that.

With our Health & Safety services, you can streamline your processes, save time and stay compliant with ever-changing regulations – and you'll get access to our **smart online hub, Atlas**, to help you manage your day-to-day activities. We'll also **create tailored documentation** and make sure your people get **care-specific**, **certified e-learning** to keep them equipped with the right skills to deliver outstanding care. Plus, you'll get access to our **24/7 advice line**, available 365 days a year.

For more information about how we can support your care businesses and to get your free quote, scan the QR code. Make sure to let us know you're a Care England member to access preferential rates.

*According to new research by HR software provider Ciphr.

Citation