

FAQs - Display Screen Equipment

How long and how often should breaks be for DSE work and what should I do during breaks?

Answer: There is no legal guidance on this point and it would depend on the kind of work you are doing but it is advisable to break up long spells of DSE work. Frequent short breaks are better than infrequent longer ones; 5–10 minute breaks every hour are better than 20 minutes every 2 hours. Ideally, users should have some choice about when to take breaks. Most jobs provide opportunities to pause from DSE work to do other tasks, such as filing or copying. If there are no such natural changes of activity in your job, your employer should plan for you to have rest breaks. It is best if breaks or changes of activity allow the user to get up from their workstation and move around, or at least stretch and change posture.

How can I protect my eyes during DSE work?

Answer: Extensive research has found no evidence that DSE work causes any permanent damage to eyes. However, long spells of DSE work can lead to tired eyes, discomfort, temporary short-sightedness and headaches. DSE work is visually demanding, so it can make you aware of eyesight problems not noticed before (including changes in eyesight that happen with age). You can help your eyes by ensuring your screen is well positioned and properly adjusted, that lighting conditions are suitable, and by taking regular breaks from screen work. Employers have to assess DSE workstations and correct any defects.

Am I entitled to an eye test if I work on DSE?

Answer: You are entitled to ask your employer to provide an eye test if you are an employee who habitually uses DSE as a significant part of your normal day to day work. This is a full eye and eyesight test by an optometrist (or a doctor).

Does my employer have to pay for DSE spectacles?

Answer: Your employer will only have to pay for spectacles if the test shows you need special corrective appliances (normally spectacles) that are prescribed for the distance the screen is viewed at. If an ordinary prescription is suitable for your DSE work, your employer does not have to pay for your spectacles.

How do the Regulations apply to work with laptops or other portable DSE?

Answer: Portable DSE such as laptops and handheld devices are subject to the Regulations if in prolonged use for work purposes. People who habitually use portable DSE should be trained in how to minimise risks, for example by sitting comfortably, angling the screen so it is easy to read and taking frequent breaks. Wherever possible, portable DSE should be placed on a firm surface at a comfortable height. Where portables are in prolonged use at the user's main place of work, additional steps can be taken to reduce risks, e.g. by using a docking station.

If my employer gives me a laptop to work at home, what else do I need to consider?

Answer: Your employer is not obliged to supply you with a workstation but should provide suitable advice on the safe use of the laptop. If your employer supplies you with workstation equipment through local arrangements (i.e. providing a chair or desk), they are required to ensure that the equipment meets the DSE Regulations, e.g. the chair or desk is stable and adjustable, and a footrest is provided if required.

Do the DSE Regulations apply to children and students?

Answer: No. The Regulations only place duties on employers in respect of employees (or self-employed persons working in the employer's undertaking). However, employers have more general duties under other legislation, such as the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, which requires work activities to be undertaken in a way that does not create risks to others, such as children or the public. These are supplemented by the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 which require an assessment of the risks arising from work activities, including how they affect the health and safety of others not in their employment but who may be affected by the work. These Regulations apply to many of the risks to students in a school environment that result from the school's work activities, although other non-HSE legislation concerning the welfare of students often takes precedence.

My wrist aches when I use my mouse. How can I prevent this?

Answer: Make sure you take adequate breaks and do not sit for long periods in a fixed posture. Put your mouse within easy reach, so you can use it with your wrist straight. Do not work with your mouse arm stretched. Support your forearm on the desk. Do not grip the mouse tightly, rest your fingers lightly on the buttons and don't press them hard. If you still can't get comfortable, try a different size or shape of mouse. Your employer should help by providing a range of such equipment.

Does my employer have to conduct a workstation assessment if I work with DSE?

Answer: The Regulations require employers to:
Analyse workstations, and assess and reduce risks.
Employers need to look at:

- the whole workstation including equipment, furniture, and the work environment;
- the job being done;
- any special needs of individual staff; and
- Where risks are identified, take steps to reduce them.
- Ensure workstations meet minimum requirements
- Plan work so there are breaks or changes of activity
- On request arrange eye tests, and provide spectacles if special ones are needed
- Provide health and safety training and information

I have to hot desk; do I have to carry out a workstation assessment every time I use a new desk?

Answer: It is necessary to ensure that the workstation you are using is not likely to cause you any health risk. In view of this you should, even if you will be spending a large part of your day there, assess that risk. It may be useful, if hot-desking is widespread in the organisation, to provide a checklist of what people should assess, this could be attached to the desk or workstation.

How often should risk assessments of DSE workstations be done?

Answer: An assessment should be done when a new workstation is set up, when a new user starts work, or when a substantial change is made to an existing workstation (or the way it is used). Assessments should be repeated if there is any reason to suspect they may no longer be valid – for example, if users start complaining of pain or discomfort.

Is there any software about carrying out a DSE risk assessment that I can use to train staff?

Answer: Software packages are on the market that can help train users and/or help them make an input to assessments. However they cannot constitute the whole of the assessment. Employers should always ensure that a properly trained assessor goes over the results of their user assessments (whether these are software based or done by other means, such as a paper checklist). The assessor's role is to clarify any doubtful points, provide any necessary feedback to users and ensure that any problems identified are put right, e.g. by changes to the DSE or workstation.

What do employers need to do for DSE training and information?

Answer: There is plenty of helpful information available from the HSE website that will help employers train and advise users about the risks in DSE work and how to avoid these by safe, effective working practices. The training should cover elements such as:

- adopting good posture
- how to adjust chairs and other furniture
- organising desk space to work comfortably
- adjusting the screen and lighting to avoid reflections and glare
- breaks and changes of activity
- contributing to risk assessments
- how to report problems

Employers should also tell users about the general arrangements they have made for health and safety in their DSE work, and how they can apply for an eye test.

Does the Display Screen give out harmful radiation?

Answer: No. The Display Screen gives out both visible light, which enables us to see the screen, and other forms of electromagnetic radiation which can be harmful above certain levels. However, the levels of radiation emitted from display screens are well below the safe levels set out in international recommendations.

What should I do if I'm pregnant?

Answer: You don't need to stop working with DSE. Many scientific studies have now been carried out and, taken as a whole; these do not show any link between miscarriages or birth defects and working with DSE. If you are anxious about your DSE or about work generally during pregnancy, you should talk to your doctor. Or you could talk to someone who is well informed about current scientific information and advice.

working with DSE cause skin disorders?

Answer: This is rare. A few people have experienced irritation, rashes or other skin problems when working with DSE. The exact cause is not known, but it seems possible that a combination of dry air, static electricity and individual susceptibility may be involved. If this is the case, increasing the humidity or allowing more fresh air into the room may help.

Can DSE trigger epileptic fits?

Answer: Most people with epilepsy are completely unaffected by DSE. A few who suffer from photo-sensitive epilepsy and are susceptible to flickering lights and striped patterns may be affected in some circumstances. But even they can often work successfully with DSE without provoking an attack.

What should I do if I have any problems?

Answer: If you are a DSE user and think you have health problems connected with your work, it's best to talk to your supervisor, manager or safety representative first. Employers have a duty to consult their employees or employee representatives on health and safety issues. It is good practice for employers to encourage early reporting of health problems, help sufferers obtain treatment they need, and help them return to work