

Health screening in the workplace

Workplace health promotion is the combined efforts of employers, employees and society to improve the health and wellbeing of people at work. Benefits include

- Improved employee satisfaction.
- Increased productivity.
- Healthier workplace.
- Improved morale.
- Fewer absences from work.

Before you implement health and wellness initiatives you need to identify the actual or potential health problems within your workforce – in other words, you need to screen your workforce. Unfortunately, implementing a workplace health screening programme is a daunting task. You want to organise a programme which is appropriate to your organisation, which benefits people's health and morale, but which is also cost effective and provides return on investment.

This guide has been developed to take you through the basics and to help you decide what components are of importance when designing your screening programme.

What is health screening and why might you want to organise it for your employees?

Put simply, screening is a process of identifying apparently healthy people who may be at increased risk of a disease or condition. At a national level, screening programmes have been developed for certain population groups, including those for breast and bowel cancer.

In recent years there has been growing realisation that the workplace is a key factor in determining an individual's health; after all, we spend almost one third of our entire adult life at work. In tandem with this, employers have recognised that employee health impacts on

productivity, absenteeism and the ability of organisations to attract and retain employees of the highest quality.

These developments have resulted in increasing numbers of organisations running corporate wellness programmes which aim to improve the health of the employee population as a whole. Without health screening, however, these generic programmes fail to deliver maximum benefit to the employees at whom they are aimed. Just as no two workplaces are the same, neither are any two employee populations the same; for maximum results, you must understand the specific needs of your employees and this is where health screening is invaluable.

So what should you screen for?

The range of screening options which you can choose to have in your programme is extensive. *Not all may be relevant or appropriate for your organisation, however, and would simply incur unnecessary cost without bringing benefit to either the organisation or to individual employees.*

Some tests, however, should be of value across all workplaces, and these should form the basis for any screening programme. We know, for example, that 61% of the Irish adult population is overweight or obese, and that approximately 50% and 25% have high cholesterol and high blood pressure, respectively. Similarly, we know that 80% of premature deaths from chronic diseases – high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke and diabetes - could be prevented by tackling just three risk factors – poor diet, smoking and lack of physical activity. Finally, we know that stress and other mental health issues, and musculoskeletal problems like low back pain, are the leading causes of workplace absenteeism in Ireland.

Taking all of this knowledge into account, the following is a sample screening programme which is likely to be of relevance and interest to all of your workforce: It covers risks like obesity, heart disease and diabetes. In addition, it focuses on employee's lifestyle and diet, thereby providing participants with insight into where and to what extent these factors are impacting on their health and wellbeing.

1. Lifestyle, diet and exercise analysis
2. Mental health questionnaire

3. Body Mass Index (BMI)
4. Waist Circumference
5. Musculoskeletal
6. Cardiovascular risk score
7. Lipids / Cholesterol
8. Fasting glucose / HbA1c
9. Blood Pressure
10. Urinalysis
11. Liver function

As noted, other tests chosen will depend on the profile of your employees and, of course, your budget. If your workforce is female, for example, you might consider adding in bone health and breast cancer awareness modules. Similarly, if you know or suspect that a high proportion of your employees are smokers then perhaps you will want to include spirometry which is a measure of lung function. We at Platform Medical will be more than happy to design a tailored programme for you upon request, taking all of these factors into account.

You've decided what conditions you want to check for. What's next?

The following is a checklist which we have developed to aid you in your decision making. While each organisation is different, and not all organisations will need or desire all components, Platform Medical can, where requested, provide all of the following services and or benefits.

Do you want a single point of contact for all screening services provided?	Yes	No
Would you like to run screening across a number of different work sites?	Yes	No
Would you like all tests to be done for each employee at one time and in one place?	Yes	No
Would you like the programme branded to your organisation such that employees will further appreciate the service being provided for them?	Yes	No
Would you like to offer different employee groups different screening programmes?	Yes	No
Would you like your employees to have the option of contributing to the programme or paying for additional tests if there are other tests which they themselves would like to have performed?	Yes	No

Would your organisation like an anonymised report at the end of the screening process which will identify key risk areas and advance potential remedial initiatives for the employee population as a whole?	Yes	No
Would your organisation like to minimise costs while maintaining quality?	Yes	No

Of course, we know that every organisation would like to minimise costs while maintaining quality.

In the past, however, screening programmes involved laborious paper-based processes which involved multiple points of contact between patient and screening provider. In addition, programmes necessitated post-screening reviews by a Doctor such that the results of screening could be explained to participants.

In contrast, Platform Medical's novel software has revolutionised this process, thereby dramatically increasing efficiency and reducing costs. By using our platform, employees need only meet our nurse on one occasion – when they are having their tests performed. Appointment booking, screening preparation and post screening education is all done online, with easy-to-understand personal reports made accessible to participants on any device connected to the Internet. Platform Medicals thus streamlines the health screening process, thereby substantially decreasing costs for the employer while simultaneously improving the employees' experience.