

## Introduction

A significant number of staff involved in delivering round-the-clock care in healthcare environments are shift workers.

### Definition of a shift worker under working time regulations

Shift worker means any worker whose work schedule is part of shift work.

Shift work means any method of organising work in shifts whereby workers succeed each other at the same workstations according to a certain pattern, including a rotating pattern, which may be continuous or discontinuous, entailing the need for workers to work at different times over a given period of days or weeks.

While patients are outside of the scope of this document, they are reliant on a workforce dedicated to providing out-of-hours care.

Shift work has many benefits for the employee. For instance, it allows employees to condense their working time to improve work-life balance and manage carer responsibilities.

However, poorly designed shift patterns, aligned with poor sleep patterns and environmental factors can have a detrimental impact on employee health and patient outcomes. Poorly managed shift patterns can, for example, increase sickness absence rates, presenteeism, increased at-work errors and patient safety incidents, and associated costs. Therefore, it is important to ensure that safeguards are put in place to support safe working practices around shift working.

This guidance has been developed in partnership with trade unions and management for the benefit of healthcare organisations. It incorporates good practice on shift working from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

It advises on key health, safety and wellbeing considerations associated with shift work in healthcare organisations and encourages partnership working between managers and union representatives to mitigate the impacts on staff and the organisation.

Unless otherwise stated, all references in this document are from Health and Safety Executive sources. This guidance applies to staff covered by the NHS Terms and Conditions of Service Handbook.