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The LifeCare Newsletter

The Why Behind Pre-Employment Medical Checks

Reducing Risks and Fostering a Safe and Healthy Workplace from Day One

Kia Ora! Welcome to Our First Newsletter of the Year!

Just like that, the first quarter of the year is almost behind us, and with April just around the corner, a new financial year is about to begin.

You may have noticed something different—our **refreshed brand look!** We're excited to share that this is the first newsletter under our new branding.

As our business evolves, so does our brand identity!

This year, our newsletter topics are **shaped by you.** Based on the insights gathered from our webinar polls last year, we'll be covering the key workplace health and safety concerns that matter most to you. Kicking things off, we're diving into the **importance of pre-employment medical checks** and how they can help **build a safer, healthier workforce from day one.**

We look forward to keeping you informed and supporting you throughout the year!



Setting the Stage

A healthy workforce is a productive workforce. As leaders, **ensuring new employees are fit for their roles is essential for workplace safety, compliance, and long-term productivity.** Pre-employment medical checks are a proactive way to **identify potential health risks before they become a workplace cost.**

With over **500,000 workplace injuries reported in New Zealand annually** (ACC New Zealand), it's crucial to take every measure to reduce risks. Implementing pre-employment medical checks can help create a safer and healthier work environment from the start.



The Role of Pre-Employment Medicals in Workplace Safety

Pre-employment medicals provide valuable insights into an employee's ability to perform their role safely. They help:

- Identify **pre-existing conditions** that could be aggravated by job demands. That means, the checks establish a **baseline record** of the health of the staff member at the time of employment, which **creates a layer of protection for the organisation.**
- **Reduce workplace injuries** and the **risk of long-term health issues** which contribute to your cost in **Lost Time Injury Rate (LTIR's).**

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- **Ensure compliance** with industry regulations under the **Health and Safety at Work Act 2015**.
 - **Detecting drug abuse**, which can impact workplace safety, decision-making, and overall performance.
 - Support employee wellbeing from day one, **fostering a culture of health and safety**.

“New Zealand’s health and safety performance is getting gradually better, but it is not good. While the workplace fatality rate has fallen by 35% over the past decade and the minor injury rate has fallen by 37%, the serious injury rate has increased by 18%”. ([Business Leaders’ Health and Safety Forum](#)).

Investing in pre-employment checks can significantly contribute to the reduction of this injury rates.



Why Many NZ Employers Skip Pre-Employment Medicals—And the Risks They Face



Pre-employment medicals are a crucial tool for businesses looking to build a safe and productive workforce. Yet, many employers in New Zealand still choose to bypass them. Whether due to cost concerns, time constraints, or a lack of awareness, skipping this step can lead to significant financial, legal, and operational risks down the line.

Why Employers Avoid Pre-Employment Medicals

1. **Cost Considerations** – Some businesses, particularly small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), see pre-employment medicals as an unnecessary upfront expense. They may assume the cost outweighs the benefits, unaware of the potential financial impact of workplace injuries or long-term health issues.
2. **Time Constraints** – Employers often prioritise speed in the hiring process, especially in industries with high turnover rates.

3. **Misplaced Confidence in Self-Reporting** – Many businesses rely solely on candidates’ self-disclosure of health conditions in job applications. However, individuals may unintentionally (or intentionally) withhold important health information to secure employment. Businesses should also assess whether their HR or H&S teams have the necessary medical expertise to properly evaluate the information provided by candidates.

4. **Lack of Awareness of Legal and Financial Risks** – Some companies do not fully understand their obligations under the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015. This act requires employers to take all practicable steps to ensure their employees are fit for the job they are hired to perform.

What Can Go Wrong? Real Risks for Employers

1. **Workplace Injuries and Compensation Claims:** A manufacturing company hires a worker without conducting a pre-employment medical. Months later, the employee suffers a back injury due to an undisclosed pre-existing condition. The business is now responsible for lost productivity, ACC claims, and potential legal action.
 2. **Health and Safety Liability:** In industries like construction and transportation, an employee’s undisclosed medical condition (such as unmanaged high glucose or hearing impairment) could lead to serious accidents. If an investigation reveals that the employer failed to conduct a proper medical assessment, hefty fines and reputational damage could follow.
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3. Reduced Productivity and Absenteeism: A worker with an undiagnosed respiratory condition is hired in a dust-heavy environment. Without the proper controls or accommodations, their condition worsens, leading to increased sick leave, reduced performance, and higher staff turnover.

4. Missing Drug Use: Not conducting pre-employment drug tests exposes employers to increased safety incidents, higher liability, productivity losses, elevated healthcare costs, compliance issues, and potential reputational damage, particularly in safety-sensitive industries.

The Hidden Costs of Skipping Pre-Employment Medicals



According to WorkSafe NZ, **workplace injuries cost the economy billions annually** in lost productivity, compensation, and rehabilitation. Implementing medical checks can help reduce this burden by identifying potential risks **before they become costly problems**.

A Smarter Approach to Workforce Health

Employers who prioritise pre-employment medicals are not only safeguarding their business but also fostering a culture of care and responsibility. By **partnering with a trusted provider**, businesses can streamline the process, **ensuring assessments are quick, cost-effective, and tailored to the specific risks** of their industry.

Coordinating pre-employment medicals can be time-consuming, but **LifeCare** makes it easier by **managing the entire booking process**. Instead of going back and forth to find a suitable time, managers can simply submit the request and leave the rest to us—saving them time and ensuring a smooth, stress-free experience.

Our **online portal simplifies administration** and saves time by keeping all essential data in one secure place for **processing, audits, and reporting**. Reports are readily available on the dashboard or delivered via email **within 24 hours** of the medical appointment, ensuring quick and easy access to crucial information.

In a world where workplace **health and safety obligations are tightening**, skipping pre-employment medicals is a gamble that could have serious consequences. **Are you prepared to take that risk?**

What's Included in a Pre-Employment Medical Check?

Ensuring a safe and healthy workplace **starts with hiring the right people**—both in terms of **skills and physical capability**. Pre-employment medical checks help businesses assess whether candidates are **fit for the demands of their roles**, reducing the risk of workplace injuries to self and others, absenteeism, and long-term health complications.

Each industry has different risks, but a comprehensive pre-employment check may include:

1. Occupational Health Questionnaire: Face-to-Face Medical History: This includes a detailed discussion of the candidate's medical background, focusing on factors that may impact their ability to perform the job safely and effectively. Key areas covered:

- Comprehensive Previous Employment History – Identifying potential health risks linked to past roles.
- Occupational Exposure Assessment:
 - **Respiratory/Lung Function** – Evaluates past or existing respiratory conditions, inhaler use, smoking habits, and any history of lung disease.
 - **Noise Exposure/Hearing** – Identifies prior ear injuries or medical issues, head trauma, history of hearing loss, and exposure to loud environments.
 - **Vision Screening** – Assesses prior eye injuries, colour blindness, depth perception, corrective lens use, and any vision-related medical conditions.
 - **Skin Health** – This is a skin health questionnaire that includes a series of targeted questions designed to identify conditions such as dermatitis, eczema, and psoriasis, which may be aggravated by workplace exposures.
 - **Musculoskeletal Health** – Screens for previous sprains, strains, or repetitive strain injuries (e.g., carpal tunnel syndrome) that may affect physical job demands.
 - **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Assessment** – Determines any potential issues with wearing safety gear like high-visibility clothing, safety boots, gloves, and hard hats.



2. Cardiovascular Disease (CVD) Screening

- Includes BMI measurement, blood pressure, and pulse checks.
- Glucose and cholesterol screening

With 1 in 5 New Zealand adults living with high blood pressure, 1 in 4 needing to manage their cholesterol, and 45 people developing diabetes every day, the stakes are high. Ensuring employees are screened for these conditions isn't just about workplace health—it's about protecting lives and reducing long-term risks.

3. Vision Screening

- Near and far acuity testing
- Depth perception assessment
- Colour vision screening
- Night vision and peripheral vision checks

4. Audiometry Screening

- Identifies early signs of noise-induced hearing loss and assesses overall hearing ability

5. Spirometry Screening

- Tests lung function to detect any respiratory issues that may impact workplace performance

6. Range of Motion (ROM) Screening

- Evaluates flexibility and mobility in the spine, neck, shoulders, elbows, wrists, hands, hips, knees, and ankles to ensure candidates can meet the physical demands of the job

7. Functional Capacity Assessment

- A Functional Capacity Assessment evaluates a candidate's physical ability to perform their job safely by identifying any pre-existing musculoskeletal conditions or functional limitations. Tailored to specific role requirements, the assessment includes a brief health history, range of movement evaluation, grip strength measurement, cardiovascular fitness test, strength and posture assessments, and a manual handling review.

8. Drug and Alcohol Screening

- **Six-panel drug screening:** THC, Opiates, Cocaine, Amphetamine, Methamphetamine, Benzodiazepines.
- Breath alcohol testing.

If a test returns a not-negative result, it will be escalated to a laboratory for confirmation testing.

9. Fatigue Testing

- **Epworth Sleepiness Scale** – Assesses daytime sleepiness and risk of excessive fatigue.
- **Obstructive Sleep Apnoea Risk Assessment** – Identifies candidates at risk of sleep-related breathing disorders.
- **Occupational Fatigue Exhaustion Recovery Score** – Evaluates a candidate's ability to recover from work-related fatigue.

The Business Case: Why Investing in Pre-Employment Checks Pays Off

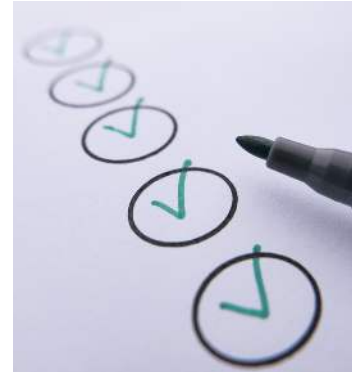


Beyond compliance and safety, pre-employment medicals contribute to business success. Companies that implement these checks report:

- Lower injury-related absenteeism
- Significant reductions in workers' compensation claims (ACC New Zealand).
- Higher productivity and lower staff turnover – Ensuring employees are physically capable reduces fatigue-related errors and burnout.



How to Introduce Pre-Employment Medical Checks Into Your Hiring Process



Ensuring workplace safety and employee wellbeing begins before a new hire even steps onto the job site. Here's a practical guide to introducing pre-employment medical checks into your hiring process effectively. And remember, LifeCare takes the hassle out of pre-employment assessments with a seamless process that ensures a smooth experience for both organisations and their candidates, saving time, reducing admin, and providing fast, reliable results.

1. Understand the Value of Pre-Employment Medical Checks

Before implementing medical assessments, it's crucial to understand their benefits:

- **Reduced Workplace Injuries** – According to WorkSafe New Zealand, around 225,000 work-related injury claims were made in 2022, costing businesses millions in lost productivity and compensation claims.
- **Improved Productivity** – Employees who are physically and mentally fit for their roles are more productive and experience fewer absences.
- **Legal Compliance** – The Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 (HSWA) requires employers to manage risks that could affect their employees' health, making pre-employment checks an important compliance measure.



2. Tailoring Medical Checks to Job Risk Levels

Not all roles carry the same level of health and safety risks, so pre-employment medical assessments **should align with job-specific demands**. Employers can categorise roles into High, Medium, and Low-risk to determine the appropriate level of screening:

- **High-risk roles (e.g., construction, manufacturing, transportation)** may require comprehensive assessments, including hearing, vision, blood glucose, lung function, functional capacity evaluations, and drug and alcohol testing.
- **Medium-risk roles (e.g., warehousing, trades, and field services)** may benefit from targeted screenings, such as vision tests, hearing, respiratory checks, and fitness-for-work evaluations.
- **Low-risk roles (e.g., office-based positions)** typically require work-station assessment and general health questionnaires to identify any pre-existing conditions that could affect workplace wellbeing.

By aligning medical checks with job risk levels, organisations can enhance workplace safety while ensuring assessments are relevant and effective.



3. Partner with a Trusted Occupational Health Provider: Collaborating with an experienced occupational health provider ensures that **assessments are conducted professionally and align with industry regulations.**

When selecting a provider, consider:

- **Their experience with your industry.**
- **The expected turnaround time for reporting and results**
- **Their ability to offer tailored assessments.**
- **Their clinical team and supporting staff.**
- **Their reporting and data security measures.**

4. Communicate Clearly with Candidates: To ensure a smooth integration of medical checks, it's important to be transparent with job applicants.

Key points to communicate include:

- **Why the medical assessment is required.**
- **What tests will be conducted.**
- **How results will be used.**
- **Assurance of confidentiality and compliance with privacy laws.**

5. Integrate Medical Checks Seamlessly into Recruitment: Pre-employment medicals should be a natural step in the hiring process, rather than a roadblock. LifeCare has a quick turnaround from booking to report delivery.

Best practices include:

- **Conducting assessments after the candidate receives a conditional job offer.**
- **Aligning medical checks with other onboarding activities to avoid delays.**
- **Explaining to your employees that certain results will require them to get a GP or optometry clearance prior to starting the role.**
- **Setting clear policies on what constitutes a “pass” or “fail” result.**

6. Monitor and Review Your Process: Once implemented, continuously review the effectiveness of pre-employment medical checks by tracking:

- **The number of workplace injuries and absenteeism rates** before and after implementation.
- **Feedback from hiring managers and employees** about the process.
- Any necessary adjustments to ensure the checks remain relevant to job roles.
- **Ongoing health monitoring through annual health assessments** to track changes in employees' health over time. This ensures a **consistent approach to workplace wellbeing, keeping records in one place from the date of employment to staff exit.**

Final Thoughts

Introducing pre-employment medical checks into your hiring process is a **strategic investment in workplace safety, compliance, and long-term productivity.** By carefully planning and integrating medical assessments, employers can reduce risks, create safer work environments, and ensure **new hires are fit for their roles from day one.**

Take Action: Make Pre-Employment Medicals Part of Your Safety Strategy. Investing in pre-employment medicals ensures that your team starts strong and stays safe.

If you're ready to take the next step, **LifeCare** can help. Our tailored pre-employment health checks ensure your **workforce is physically and mentally prepared for the demands of their jobs.**

Get in touch today to learn more!

Thank you for reading!

The **LifeCare** Team

