

Caring for those who care

National Programmes for Occupational Health for Health Workers

POLICY BRIEF



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DR TEDROS ADHANOM GHEBREYESUS
DIRECTOR-GENERAL
WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

WORLD PATIENT SAFETY DAY, 2020

“The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the urgent need for strong national programmes to protect the health and safety of health workers, medical professionals, emergency responders, and the many other workers risking their lives on our behalf.”



GUY RYDER
DIRECTOR-GENERAL
INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION

WORLD PATIENT SAFETY DAY, 2020

“We need special measures to protect the millions of health workers and other workers who risk their own health for us every day. I call on all countries to assure well-defined, decent and safe working conditions for all health workers.”

Safe health workers, Safe patients



Speak up
for health worker safety!

 **World Patient Safety Day** 17 September 2020

Executive summary

Health is a universal human right and a main contributor to well-being, economic development, growth, wealth and prosperity for all. Health systems play a key role in protecting, restoring and maintaining the health of patients and populations. A well-trained, motivated and supported health workforce is the backbone of every health system and without them, there would be no health care.

Health workers around the world are at the front line of the daily battle to contain diseases and to save lives while often risking their own health and sometimes their lives. Unsafe working conditions increase the risk of occupational diseases and injuries among health workers and jeopardize patient safety, quality of care and the overall resilience of health systems.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has drawn attention to the importance of the protection of health workers (1), emphasizing the need to ensure that the occupational safety and health of health workers is a priority. This is fundamental if they are to be enabled to do their jobs and to protect the health of patients and populations. The development and implementation of national programmes for protecting the health and safety of all health workers is an effective way to ensure the application of national occupational safety and health legislation and policies tailored to the needs of the health sector.

This policy brief is intended to provide a short overview on the issues and recommendations for policy decision-makers in ministries of health and ministries of employment and labour; local authorities; managers of health facilities; professional associations of the various groups of health workers; and organizations of workers and employers in the health sector.

Key messages

- Protecting health workers and ensuring occupational health and safety is fundamental for well-functioning and resilient health systems.
- Health workers face a range of occupational risks associated with biological, chemical, physical, ergonomic and psychosocial hazards including violence, affecting the safety of both health workers and patients.
- Ensuring the occupational safety and health of health workers needs to be a priority and is a

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