EPILEPSY NEW ZEALAND
Kia titiro ki te tangata | See the person

Health and Safety in the Workplace

New Zealand Health and Safety at Work Act 2015

The Act and related regulations require that workers and others are given the highest level of protection from workplace health and safety risks, so far as is reasonably practicable. This includes risks to both physical and mental health.

The Act introduces a new term, "Person Conducting a Business or Undertaking" (PCBU), which captures employers, self-employed, principals to contracts, manufacturers, designers, etc. who have the primary health and safety duties. Workers also have duties under the Act. Workers include employees and contractors.

Workplace health and safety is both an individual and shared responsibility. Business owners, workers, officers, suppliers and manufacturers have a variety health and safety obligations.

Find out more at Worksafe.

Seizures/Epilepsy in the Work Place

The risks that epilepsy poses in the workplace will vary greatly depending on the person and situation.

Risk can depend on a number of factors including:

- The nature of the work or role. For example, there may be additional risks associated with seizures when work is conducted at a height, under extreme temperatures, or using dangerous machinery
- The nature of the workplace
- The level of uncontrolled seizure activity the person experiences. For most people living with epilepsy (around 70% of all diagnosed), anti-epileptic drugs fully controls their seizures
- The type of seizures the person experiences. The situation of a person experiencing tonic-clonic seizures will vary considerably from a person who experiences focal aware seizures, which may be barely perceptible and involve little movement
- Whether the person has identifiable seizure triggers. Some people with epilepsy can manage their seizure activity by avoiding things that tend to trigger seizures. This varies greatly depending on the person, although some commonly reported triggers include tiredness,

alcohol and missed medication. As seizure activity is often affected by sleep, some people living with epilepsy may need to avoid night shifts or irregular work patterns

- Whether the person experiences warning signs before a seizure. Some people living with epilepsy experience warning signs prior to a seizure, which may give them an opportunity to remove themselves from a dangerous situation.

Assessing and mitigating the risks

Assessing and mitigating the risks that affect the health, safety and welfare of people in the workplace is fundamental to:

- Meeting legal requirements
- Attracting and retaining valuable skilled staff. People living with epilepsy are excellent workers and can contribute greatly to a business or organisation
- Maximising employee productivity. Much like anyone else, people living with epilepsy are highly productive workers in a healthy and safe workplace
- Minimising injury and illness in the workplace
- Reducing the costs of injury and workers' compensation
- Ensuring you meet your legal obligations and employee responsibilities.

It is important to remember that blanket prohibitions are discriminatory and a fair assessment of the individual situation is fundamental to an inclusive workplace, while also meeting health and safety obligations. While not all people living with epilepsy identify as having a disability, it is notable that people with disabilities actually have a lower number of workplace health and safety incidents, as well as much lower workers compensation and costs, compared to the average employee.