

# Occupational Health & Wellness for **Hospitality / Hotel Workers**

R. Gagne, EET, CFE, NADEP

HEALTHY WORKER SERIES 2.0

The fast-paced, chaotic nature of working in the hospitality industry means workers face many different risks of injury on the job. Unfortunately, hundreds of thousands of hospitality workers suffer workplace injuries that cause them to miss some time from work. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, approximately 1 in 1,000 hotel workers is injured on the job each year, with sprains/strains, cuts, falls, slips/trips and bruises among the most common injuries. More than a quarter of these injuries required more than a month off work for the individual to recover. The Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that hotel and motel workers had an injury and illness incidence rate of 4.3, while total recordable cases of all other industries are 3.1.



*Hotels are complex for risk management as they have the widest variety of workers among almost any class, and of course there's a variety of hotels, ranging from your resort hotels down to motels. The wide variety of workers that exists adds complexities for those hotels and motels' ability to mitigate risk factors. You have everything from housekeepers to laundry staff, to restaurant workers and clerical workers, to landscapers and maintenance, so there's a wide variety of workers and it can be a challenge." -R. Gagne, Work Comp Specialist*

Although all workers in the hospitality industry can potentially suffer work-related accidents, housekeepers, kitchen staff, waiters, and room attendants are more likely to suffer work-related injuries compared to others due to the nature of their work. Below are some of the most common injuries in the hospitality and tourism industry.

The hospitality industry encompasses a wide range of jobs and occupations, and the risks and dangers associated with each job can vary widely depending on the specific role and work environment. However, some of the most dangerous jobs in the hospitality industry include:

- **Kitchen workers** - working in a fast-paced, high-pressure environment where sharp knives, hot surfaces, and boiling liquids are common, kitchen workers face a high risk of burns, cuts, and other injuries.
- **Housekeeping staff** - cleaning and maintaining hotel rooms can involve exposure to hazardous cleaning chemicals, lifting heavy objects, and working in cramped spaces, putting housekeeping staff at risk of back injuries, respiratory problems, and other health issues.

- **Security personnel** - responsible for ensuring the safety and security of guests and staff, security personnel often face confrontational and dangerous situations, such as breaking up fights, dealing with intoxicated guests, and responding to emergency situations.
- **Bartenders and servers** - working in a high-pressure environment where alcohol is served can put bartenders and servers at risk of physical assault, harassment, and other types of violence from patrons.

It is important to note that safety measures and training can greatly reduce the risks associated with these jobs, and employers have a responsibility to provide a safe work environment for their employees.

A **2010 survey** by the Bureau of Labor statistics (BLS) found that of 1.7 million people employed in the hotel and hospitality industry, 25% are housekeepers. **In 2010 there were 66,000 non-fatal work injuries and almost 30,000 days of lost-time.**

# Challenges

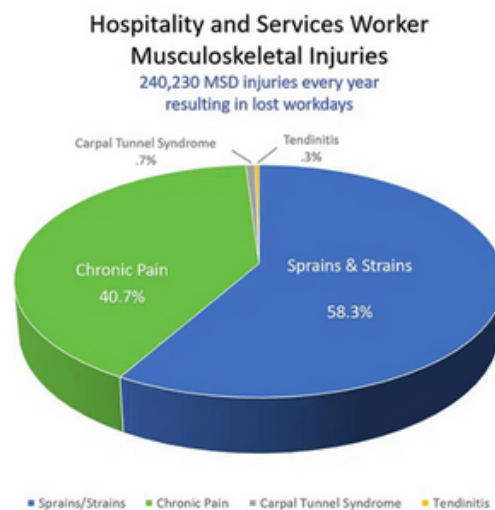
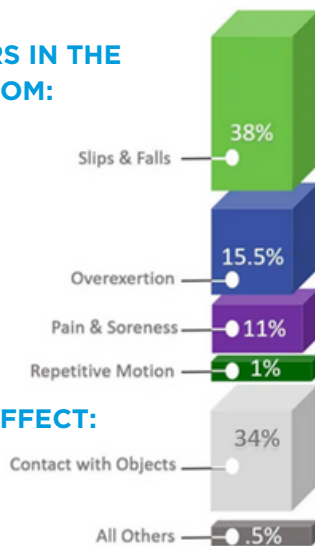
**Musculoskeletal injuries:** The work of many hotel workers involves lifting and bending, which can lead to musculoskeletal injuries such as back pain, neck pain, or limb pain. In the US, hotel workers are nearly 40% more likely to be injured on the job than all other service sector workers. Hotel workers also sustain more severe injuries resulting in more days off work, more job transfers, and more medically restricted work compared to other employees in the hospitality industry [USBLS, 2005].

## COMMON INJURIES TO WORKERS IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY ARE FROM:

- Muscular and musculoskeletal trauma
- Slips and trips
- Cuts and burns
- Exposure to heat and/or cold
- Electrical hazards
- Hitting or being hit by an object
- Mental stress
- Fatigue

## THE MOST COMMON INJURIES AFFECT:

- Upper limbs (42%)
- Trunk (18%)
- Lower limbs (15%)
- Head (6%)
- Psychological injury (4%)



SOURCE: <https://injuryfacts.nsc.org/work/industry-incidence-rates/industry-profiles/>

## THE ACCIDENTS COMMONLY RESULT IN:

- **Acute Trauma** is often the result of trips, slips and falls. Housekeeping professionals are at higher risk due to the amount of time they spend on slick surfaces in bathrooms, which create ideal conditions for slip and fall injuries. Additionally, they often have obstructed vision when carrying linens, pushing carts, or performing other tasks that can cause conditions for tripping and falling. The same occurs for baggage handlers, maintenance and landscaper staff.
- **Cumulative Trauma Injuries** can develop from repetition, force or improper work positioning. These are injuries resulting from the repetitive and stressful actions performed every day which led to sensitive nerve tissue and tendons caused by constant use over an extended period of time. These injuries develop gradually over a period of time (weeks, months, and even years) and can cause pain in the wrist, back, neck and shoulder. Cumulative trauma injuries can result in: Strained shoulders, pulled back, arm injuries, neck injuries, knee injuries, broken bones, trauma injuries, torn muscles, ligaments and tendons.
- **Respiratory illnesses** from repeated exposure to chemical cleaning agents can cause respiratory problems and cleaning up waste, and potential blood-borne pathogen on improperly disposed items can expose workers to infectious diseases.
- **Skin reactions:** as workers come into contact with chemicals when handling cleaning agents. Sometimes, these chemicals could trigger allergic reactions that could develop into severe complications, affecting the workers' ability to perform job duties.
- **Cuts, lacerations, and punctures** occur when staff come into contact with sharp objects such as knives and other electronic kitchen appliances. Additionally, tripping and falling on sharp objects could also result in cuts, lacerations, and punctures.
- **Burns and scalds** are prevalent among the kitchen staff who have to work with fire at all times. Besides kitchen staff, waiters are also at the risk of scalds as they serve hot drinks and food.

### COMMON CAUSES OF HOTEL WORKER INJURIES:

- **Repetitive movements.** The job of a hotel worker demands plenty of repeated movements. The primary risk factors for repetitive motion injuries (RMIs) to workers are forceful upper limb movements in awkward positions which pose a high risk for shoulder, arm and neck injuries and excessive bodily motions and heavy physical workload which increase the risk of back injuries.
- **Working in small spaces with awkward postures.** Space limitations requiring workers to use various uncomfortable postures. Workers often are in awkward postures while cleaning areas like the bathrooms or storerooms. They often make extreme reaches above shoulder height. Hotel houseworkers change their body position every three seconds while they clean a room. Example: Assuming the average cleaning time for every room is around 25 minutes, estimates are during each shift, the houseworkers assume 8,000 different body postures.
- **Trips, slips and falls.** In this job, there are a number of opportunities for workers to lose their footing/balance when they're walking in and out of the building to do their job, mopping restrooms and floors and waxing/stripping floors. In fact, showers and bathtubs rank among the highest injury risk for "slip and falls", in terms of location. The same applies for bell hops or maintenance workers having to deal with the environmental elements.
- **Lifting.** Workers often lift and move objects. The weight of lifting, carrying and moving the trash can lead to shoulder and back injuries. Workers also often lift, carry and move cleaning equipment between rooms which are hard on their bodies or baggage transfer and loading. Pushing and pulling heavy equipment and supplies carts can also lead to injury.
- **Working with sharp objects.** Houseworkers risk injuries from broken glass, needles and other sharp objects when collecting trash.
- **Overexertion.** Workers overuse tendons and muscles causing irritation. Tired tendon, ligaments and muscles are more prone to injury.

### KEY DRIVERS OF LOST PRODUCTIVITY:

**Presenteeism:** the practice of coming to work despite illness, injury, anxiety, etc., resulting in reduced productivity. Commonly reduces individual productivity by 33% or more. (Harvard Business Review) Injuries and pain are shown to increase presenteeism 79%. (National Institute of Health National Library of Medicine). Overall, presenteeism costs U.S. employers over \$150 billion a year due to employees coming to work sick.

**Pain conditions** associated with sitting, like back pain, arthritis, and headaches, cost \$47 billion a year in reduced employee performance. (Harvard Business Review)

**Absenteeism:** missing work due to injury, illness, travel for offsite care, or without good reason. Annual costs due to unscheduled absenteeism of hospitality workers is \$8.5 billion.

## Solutions

**Ergonomics in Hotels:** Hotels are a particular type of workplace that requires special attention to ergonomics. Hotel employees, such as housekeepers, bellhops, and front desk staff, are often required to perform physically demanding tasks, such as lifting heavy luggage, cleaning rooms, and standing for extended periods. Failure to implement ergonomics in hotels can result in work-related injuries and musculoskeletal disorders, which can lead to high healthcare costs and employee turnover. The promotion and implementation of ergonomics standards would be an asset.



### INJURY PREVENTION

- Pre-employment physical testing
- Drug screens via local Occupational Health clinic
- Conduct regular risk assessments
- Provide comprehensive training programs
- Promote ergonomic practices
- Use technology
- Implement crowd management strategies
- Collaborate with suppliers and vendors
- Regular floor maintenance and clear signage
- Open communication and participation
- Evaluate and improve safety protocols
- Chemical safety and hazard symbols
- Slip, trip and fall prevention
- Personal protective equipment basics

### OPTIMIZE POST INJURY CARE DELIVERY

- **Access to Care** On-Site or Near -Site access to Occ Health is key to reducing overall cost and risk.
- **Prevention and Wellness Services** such as preventive screenings, immunizations.
- **Choose your Occupational Team** wisely building your team with those that are familiar with the worksite and its challenges is integral.
- **Diagnostics & Testing** play a significant role in the determination of the treatment directive for most serious injuries and the time delays in receiving them can negatively affect recovery through prolonged delays, degraded health, and discomfort of the employee.
- **Time to Care Delivery** As with any injury, it is paramount that we expedite care delivery for all injuries to ensure minimal discomfort to employees and to prevent downtime at the employer.
- **Continuum of Care** If an injury does occur, you want a trained medical team that is familiar with the company and the workloads of the employees

The average cost of workers' compensation insurance for hospitality and services companies is \$2058.80 per employee per year (\$1.02 per work hour).

Workers' Compensation Lab

## Results

- **90%** of employees with initial injuries return to work for their next scheduled shift.
- **90%** of lower back pain cases do not need X-rays.
- We see significant injuries in the same day. For non-urgent injuries, we see them within three days or less.
- **92%** of urgent care clinics-maintained wait times of 30 minutes or less in 2015. The Urgent Care Association of America's 2016 Benchmarking Report
- **57%** of urgent care patients experience wait times of less than 15 minutes.
- When you're seen for healthcare concerns more quickly, you're able to receive a diagnosis and start appropriate treatment more quickly too. Not only does this efficiency mean less wasted time for you, but it also means you'll be feeling like yourself again in no time. In comparison, it should be noted that National standards show that the average wait time at an emergency room is four hours.
- Studies show the treatment for the most common injuries and illnesses at an occupational health or urgent care is equal to or better than the care at emergency rooms. Urgent care centers are also known for more personalized care. The walk-in urgent clinic is a medical facility that provides relatively quick treatment for acute illnesses and minor injuries. Urgent care centers are well known for being the first-place people turn to for quick medical assistance. When most people think of urgent care centers, they automatically assume that they only offer treatment for non-life-threatening medical conditions. However, urgent care centers can offer much more to the public as a valuable member of the medical community.

## Summary and Overview

Our hope with this article is to provide a better understanding of the hazards that the workers in the Hotel and Hospitality Industry have as well as their consequences on health, wellness, and productivity. The use of Occupational Health clinics and Urgent Care clinics has proven to save money by reducing unnecessary ER use and reducing hospitalizations, while community access and close proximity reduces downtime. Employers that have implemented injury prevention and Post Injury Care efforts focusing on musculoskeletal and ergonomic concerns have reported reduced work-related injuries and associated workers' compensation costs. Fewer injuries can also improve morale, reduce employee turnover, encourage employees to stay longer and discourage senior employees from retiring early.

### RESOURCES

CDC NIOSH WORKSHEET: <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2023-116/2023-116.pdf?id=10.26616/NIOSH PUB2023116>

Effects of a work injury prevention program for housekeeping in the hotel industry, February 2004 Work 22(3):239-46 Source PubMed M.R Landers

Safety interventions for the prevention of accidents at work: A systematic review, Johnny Dyreborg, Published online 2022 Jun 1. Doi: 10.1002/cl2.1234

Occupational Health Hazards in Hospitality Industry and Their Prevention (Review article) January 2021 Journal of Occupational Medicine 45(1):65-80

DOI:10.21608/ejom.2021.143334

Prioritizing industries for occupational injury prevention and research in the Services Sector, 2002-2010 Naomi J Anderson, David K Bonauto & Darrin Adams



*"At Bon Secours Mercy Health, we pride ourselves in assisting the Hotel and Hospitality Industry to determine the appropriate solution for their employee health and wellness options. Whether it is an on-site or near-site solution, our staff have the expertise and passion to assist in risk mitigation, reduce claim cost and overall provide an excellent quality of care for the employees."*

**Anne Dunnington**

Vice President, Bon Secours Mercy Health Occupational Health Services

## Learn More

To receive more information on how an integrated approach towards occupational health can help your employees, please reach out to us at:

**Bon Secours Mercy Health, 1701 Mercy Health Place,  
Cincinnati, OH 45237, (855) 504-0424.**

