

SPECSAVERS CORPORATE EYECARE'S

Information and Procurement Tool series

Guide to DSE eyecare

For the Republic of Ireland

Employers' information on
eyecare regulations for screen-users
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INTRODUCTION

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007, are in place to protect anyone who regularly uses a display screen in the course of their work. The regulations are lengthy, open to misinterpretation and, at times, confusing. This guide to display screen equipment (DSE) eyecare, by Specsavers Corporate Eyecare, aims to make the rules easy for employers and managers to understand and apply.

To provide the information in a user-friendly and readily accessible format, the guide to DSE Eyecare is broken down into two main sections:

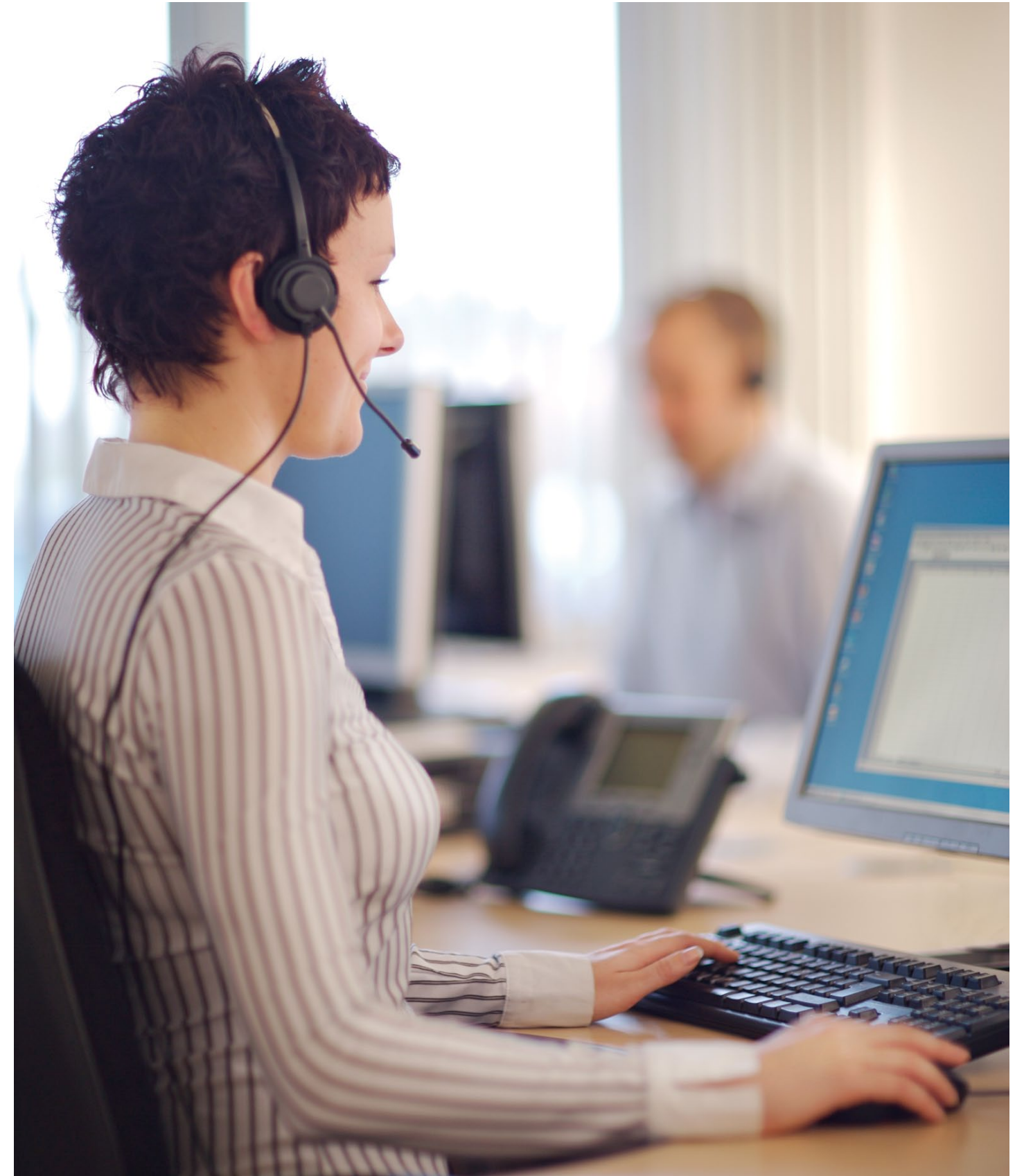
- Key facts
- Detailed exploration of the guidelines

The key facts provide a quick reference guide, with fuller analysis given in the detailed exploration of the guidelines.

For more information on the regulations and their application in the workplace, contact Specsavers Corporate Eyecare on 0818 275 664 or ie.corporateeyecare@specsavers.com

KEY FACTS

- The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007 apply to any employee who habitually uses display screen equipment as a significant part of his or her normal work. This covers anyone who uses a VDU for near-continuous spells of an hour or more at a time
- It is the responsibility of the employer to train users, assess workstations, reduce the risks and plan changes of activity or breaks for users
- Using a VDU has not been shown to cause permanent damage to the eyes or eyesight. However, some people will need glasses for screen use
- An eye test should be given before VDU use begins and at regular intervals thereafter.
- The employer must fund VDU eye tests
- If it is found that spectacles are required specifically for VDU use, the employer must fund the cost for basic frames and lenses
- There is no requirement for employees to make any contribution to the cost
- Users are entitled to make further requests for eye tests at regular intervals or at any point that they feel VDU work is causing visual discomfort
- There is no provision within the regulations for contact lenses
- Laptops are not covered by the regulations
- Bifocals or varifocals are to be treated with caution for VDU work. The decision is ultimately the optometrist's
- If the user's own spectacles are suitable for VDU work then there is no requirement for the employer to pay for them or to provide additional glasses
- The employer is required to communicate details about VDU health and safety to all relevant employees
- Additional benefits, such as retinal screening, are often available at no extra cost and add value for money to this legal obligation



DETAILED EXPLORATION OF THE GUIDELINES

Background

In the late 1980s, when DSE became widely used in the workplace, there were real concerns that radiation from the screens and monitors could damage people’s eyes. This led to the enactment of legislation to ensure that companies took the health of their employees’ eyes seriously. Extensive research has since found no evidence that DSE can cause disease or permanent damage to eyes. However, long spells of use can lead to tired eyes and discomfort, which in turn will have an impact on the individual’s concentration and productivity.

Who is covered?

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007 are in place to protect workers who regularly use computer screens. Chapter 5 of part 2 covers DSE specifically.

DSE refers to any alphanumeric or graphic display screen, regardless of the display process involved. Any member of staff who ‘habitually’ uses DSE may request that their employer pays for them to have an eye examination and glasses if they are necessary. The specific details determining those covered by the regulations are:

- If the employee has no choice but to use the VDU to carry out their work
- If the employee normally uses the VDU continuously for more than an hour

- If the VDU is generally used by the employee daily

Display screen equipment is defined as computer screens and microfiche readers and applies to cathode ray tube screens and other display processes, such as liquid crystal. Screens for showing films, videos, television pictures or surveillance are not covered under the regulations. Those with a range of functions, including viewing data and graphics, will need to be assessed and will fall under the regulations depending on the function for which they are most commonly used.

Laptops are not covered as DSE regulations state that the keyboard shall be tiltable and separate from the screen so as to allow the user to find a comfortable working position.

With a complex mix of factors and a subjective element involved, a policy of inclusion is often the best option. Employers can spend far more time and money trying to exclude one person from their cover than it would take to include everyone in a blanket, low-cost scheme.

The regulations do, however, specifically state some equipment that is NOT included:

- Drivers’ cabs or control cabs for vehicles or machinery
- Computer systems on board a means of transport

- Computer systems mainly intended for public use
- Portable display screen equipment not in prolonged use at a workstation
- Calculators, cash registers and any equipment having a small data or measurement display required for direct use of the equipment
- Typewriters of traditional design, of the type known as ‘typewriter with window’

Guidelines in practice

Under the DSE regulations, the eye ‘test’ actually entitles the employee to a test of vision and an examination of the eye, designed to find eye defects, injury and diseases that may not result in vision disturbances.

It is commonly thought that eye tests must be carried out annually. The regulations actually state that eye tests must be carried out before commencing display screen work and at regular intervals thereafter. The intervals will be determined by factors such as the age of the employee and the intensity of VDU use. In reality, it is often best to leave this decision to the expertise of the optometrist. Staff are, however, also entitled to claim eye tests at any time if they feel their eyes have been damaged or strained or if they have suffered headaches as a consequence of VDU work.

The intermediate distance for screen use is typically between 33 and 60cm. With the variety of DSE available today, this cannot, however, be automatically assumed. The critical criteria are, therefore, whether glasses are specifically required to view the screen clearly at the correct distance for that particular device and whether this would be possible with the users’ uncorrected vision or using glasses already required for general day-to-day use.

Indeed, the regulations state that employers are required only to provide ‘special’ corrective appliances (glasses) solely and specifically for reading a display screen. These are distinguished from ‘normal’ corrective appliances that are, quite simply, glasses that are used for anything else.

Despite the exaggerated fears of many employers, the number of employees needing spectacles for VDU work is actually a very small proportion of users, usually less than 10%. Depending on the workplace demographics, this can often be a lot lower, although a workforce with an average age over 40 will be particularly susceptible to presbyopia (the inability to maintain a clear image as objects are moved closer), which is an age-related condition.

Who should pay?

The DSE regulations clearly state that the employer must pay the full costs of an eye examination and the provision of basic glasses when required for VDU use. This does, however, take into account any entitlement which an employee may have to any tests and appliances provided by the State.

If special corrective appliances (spectacles) are required exclusively for working at a display screen they must be provided at no cost to the employee. Should the spectacles be used also for other purposes the employer must cover the cost of the correction required for working with display screens.

Keeping costs down

It is wise for the employer to appoint their chosen optician, rather than leaving the decision to each individual member of staff as the cost differences between providers can be enormous. Enrolling all staff with the same eyecare provider – in just the same way as all signing up to the same medical insurance scheme – ensures that the company will get the most economic deal.

The Specsavers Corporate Eyecare proposition is based on vouchers and can

provide an eye examination and complete glasses for as little as €25 per person.

Understanding the risk

While the DSE regulations aim to protect the health of people who work with VDUs, it does not mean that such work is risky. If the user follows good practice, such as setting up their workstation well and taking breaks in intensive work, then there is no reason why it is not totally safe.

The regulations were introduced because DSE was becoming so common in the workplace. There was potential, therefore, to make work more comfortable and productive for a very large number of people by taking a few simple precautions.

People who need glasses for reading will also need to use them for computer work. Even people with nothing wrong with their eyesight can find, however, that they get headaches when using a computer for too long. Shifting gaze from screen to keyboard means eyes have to change focus quickly, resulting in eyestrain, hence the importance of regular breaks or changes of activity. Although the regulations set no specific frequency for breaks, no single continuous period of work at a screen should, in general, exceed one hour.

Providers

Finding the right provider of corporate eyecare is important on a number of levels. It must be able to offer a consistent level of service and be considered trustworthy by both the company and the employee. Administration needs to be considered as systems that save time will save money. Cost control is paramount: there are a number of options that will satisfy legislation and they all come with a different price tag; by choosing the right supplier it is possible to save a third of what some will charge.

Communication

Communication is the vital element in making benefits pay for themselves and the regulations state that the employer must make known the provision of eyecare. With employer-funded eyecare available for most employees, it is vital that staff are fully aware of their entitlement, not only so that they claim it but also so that it is achieved most cost-effectively.

Poor communication of entitlement, leading to the employee choosing their own provider of eyecare, can prove an extremely costly mistake. An employer presented with an expense form for a more costly option will either have to swallow this additional and sometimes excessive cost as a business or pass it back to the unsuspecting employee.

Materials explaining to employees what they are entitled to and how the process works are very important. All supporting documents should be written and communicated in a way that is clear, concise and easy to understand.

Wider benefits

Specsavers has now completed the installation of millions of pounds-worth of life-saving digital retinal cameras (also known as fundus cameras) in its network of stores across Ireland. The cameras allow the provision of a digital retinal screening service to all appropriate clients. Retinal screening with a fundus camera is an integral part of health and wellbeing, with the emphasis on preventative care.

Now being used routinely by Specsavers Corporate Eyecare in full eye examinations for the over-40s, including for VDU and safety eyewear, the fundus technology allows the optometrist to detect and monitor the following illnesses and health conditions:

- diabetes
- various heart conditions
- cancers of the eye, such as melanomas
- brain tumours
- high cholesterol
- detached retina
- hypertension (high blood pressure)
- glaucoma

FURTHER READING

The best policy

The appropriate steps must be taken by all employers to ensure they are complying fully with the DSE regulations. The best option is for an eyecare policy to be created and applied. This will help to ensure that all obligations are met and also that this basic but essential health care effectively delivers the many, often free, additional benefits for employees and employers alike.

Work with display screen equipment

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007 can be found via www.hsa.ie. Chapter 5 of part 2 covers Display Screen Equipment.

The objective of this document is to give general guidance regarding eye health in the workplace. It is not intended as a legal interpretation of the legislation.