



# TOTAL WORKER HEALTH®

## What is Total Worker Health?

Total Worker Health (TWH) is defined as the “policies, programs, and practices that integrate protection from work-related safety and health hazards with promotion of injury and illness prevention efforts to advance worker well-being.”<sup>1</sup>



## Why are Total Worker Health approaches important?

Research has shown that working conditions and other factors at work can play a role in the long-term health of employees.<sup>2</sup> To date, studies have linked working conditions and certain industries and occupations to a number of health conditions including depression,<sup>3,4</sup> obesity,<sup>5,6</sup> heart disease,<sup>7,8</sup> and type 2 diabetes.<sup>9</sup> These illnesses can lead to work absences and early disability, and decreased individual lifetime earnings and productivity.

By considering workplace conditions as important determinants of health, the TWH approach seeks to improve the overall health and well-being of workers and their families.

## How do Total Worker Health strategies work?

While launching a comprehensive approach may seem overwhelming, there are simple steps organizations can follow to begin. [Fundamentals of Total Worker Health® Approaches: Essential Elements for Advancing Worker Safety, Health, and Well-Being](#) is a practical starting point for anyone

interested in aligning their workplace safety and health program with the TWH approach.

Below are some of the benefits achievable when using TWH strategies:

- **Integrating safety and health efforts to have greater impact.** A study of blue-collar workers, in 15 mid- and large-size manufacturing worksites, showed that the smoking quit rate more than doubled with the addition of worksite occupational safety and health programs to a smoking cessation effort, compared to those receiving the smoking cessation intervention alone.<sup>10</sup>
- **Healthier workplace policies can lower injury risks.** In a NIOSH study, workers with access to paid sick leave were 28% less likely than workers without access to paid sick leave to be injured on the job. While the association between paid sick leave and occupational injury varied across sectors and occupations, the greatest differences occurred in high-risk occupations.<sup>11</sup>
- **Increased employee involvement in worksite health programs, such as through safety and well-being committees.** Encouraging workers to get involved with the design, implementation, and evaluation of programs helps to identify safety and health issues that are most appropriate, detect and reduce barriers to participation, and increase employee support and participation in the program activities in the long run.<sup>12</sup>
- **Increased effectiveness of worksite programs to improve worker health.** Studies of TWH interventions (such as rest, walk and stretch breaks, healthy meeting policies, flexible work schedules, improved ergonomic designs to work spaces, and work stress interventions) have shown positive improvements in health among participants, including lower systolic blood pressure measures by at least 6mm/Hg as well as lower cholesterol levels by 5.9 mg/dL.<sup>13</sup>
- **A happier, less stressful workplace.** Workers felt more appreciated and supported when their employers prioritized making work healthier and safer.<sup>14</sup>

While data confirm that TWH approaches work, more research is needed. Still, TWH is a promising field with a growing body of evidence indicating it can yield positive outcomes for employees, their families, employers, and the community.

## Additional Resources

- [Sign up for the TWH in Action! eNewsletter](#)
- [Ideas You Can Implement Right Now](#)
- [Total Worker Health: Planning, Assessment, and Evaluation Resources](#)
- [Archived Webinar: Integrated Safety and Health for Small Businesses](#) (requires Adobe Connect)

The [CDC Workplace Health Resource Center \(WHRC\)](#) is a one-stop shop for organizations to find credible tools, guides, case studies, and other resources to design, develop, implement, evaluate, and sustain workplace health promotion programs, including resources for *Total Worker Health* approaches.

## References

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