

Newsletter December 2020

As we come to the end of the year, we are pleased to provide you with the latest summary of the cases reported to THOR from July to September 2020. Although the COVID-19 pandemic led to a reduction in reported cases during the early part of the year, cases did improve over the summer with 96 cases reported this quarter. As a consequence of the pandemic, the majority of cases reported to THOR were from the healthcare sector, and the most frequently reported occupations were nurses and nursing assistants (see page 2 and 3 for summary statistics).

In November, Professor Cath Noakes gave a fantastic Lane Lecture on the physical mechanisms for COVID-19 spread and the engineering controls that can be part of mitigation. If you missed it, you can find a link to Cath's presentation on page 4.

Within this newsletter Martin Seed reports on some of the cases this quarter. Giving interesting examples that highlight the potential direct and indirect consequences of Covid-19 on work related ill-health, including ergonomic risks due to working from home.



We are pleased to announce the launch of our Twitter account! You can follow us [@THOR_UoM](https://twitter.com/THOR_UoM) for the latest news and information about THOR.

We hope you enjoy reading this newsletter and hope you have a wonderful Christmas and a happy new year.



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Summary statistics this quarter

Physicians reported 96 cases of work-related ill-health to THOR between 1st July and 30th September 2020 (Table 1). Occupational physicians reported 44%, dermatologists reported 11%, chest physicians reported 38% and general practitioners reported 7% of the total number of cases.

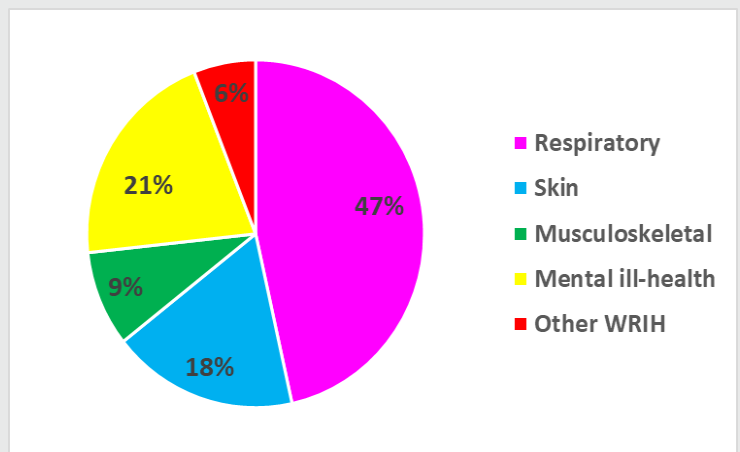
Table 1: Number of cases and diagnoses reported to THOR between July and September 2020

Scheme	Cases	Diagnoses
OPRA	42	56
EPIDERM	11	13
SWORD	36	46
THOR-GP*	7	9
Total	96	124

*THOR-GP physicians report actual cases only

The majority of diagnoses reported to THOR this quarter were respiratory diseases (47%), 21% were mental ill-health, 18% were skin diseases, 9% were musculoskeletal disorders, and 6% were other work-related ill-health conditions (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Proportion of diagnoses by disease category reported to THOR this quarter. *WRIH* : Work related ill-health.



The mean age of the cases reported to THOR was 52 years old (age range for all cases was 20-91 years). Figure 1 shows the proportion of cases reported by age group to THOR. Cases reported to THOR were 47% in females and 53% in males.

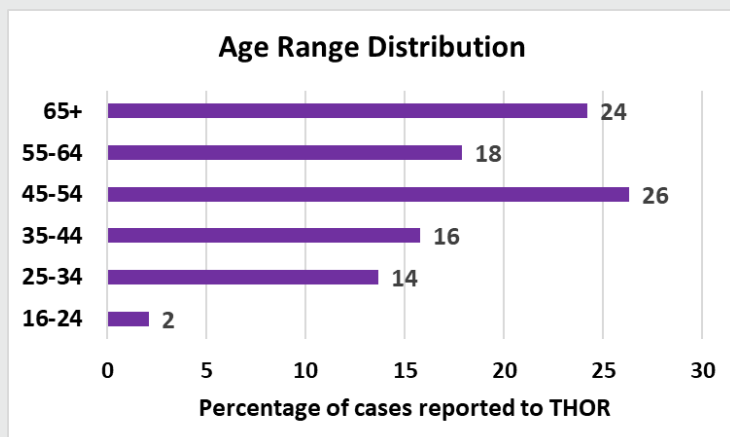
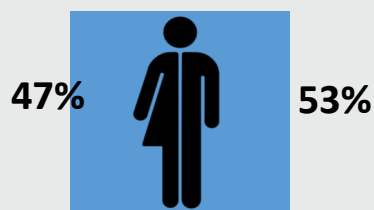


Figure 1: Percentage of cases by age group reported to THOR this quarter.



29% of all respiratory diseases were related to **asthma**



86% of all skin diseases were related to **contact dermatitis**



55% of all musculoskeletal diseases were related to the **back/lumber spine**



42% of all mental ill-health diseases were related to **work related stress**

Summary statistics this quarter-continued

The most frequently reported sector for this quarter was healthcare (39%). Followed by construction (10%), public administration and defence (5%), other personal service activities including hairdressing and beauty treatments (5%), and education (4%). Other industries (with 3 or less cases) made up 36% of the cases reported this quarter (Figure 3).

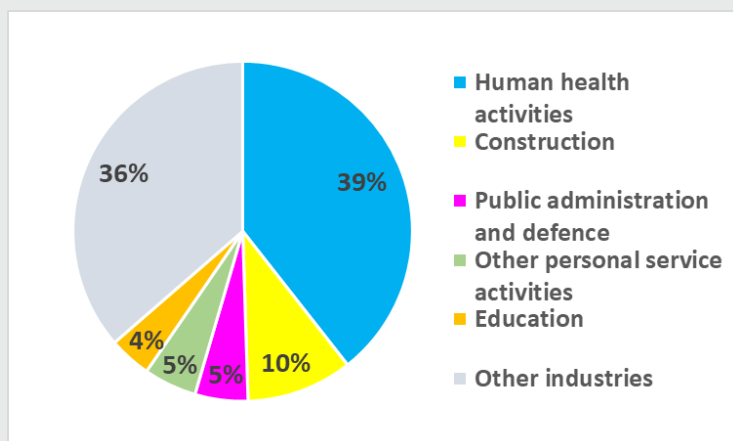


Figure 3: Proportion of industries reported to THOR between July to September 2020.

The most frequently reported occupation to THOR this quarter was nursing auxiliaries and assistants (15%). Following this were other healthcare occupations, with nurses at 7% and medical practitioners at 5% (see below for further details).

Most frequently reported occupations:

15% Nursing auxiliaries and assistants

7% Nurses

5% Medical practitioners

5% Carpenters and joiners

4% Bakers and flour confectioners

4% Beauticians and related occupations

4% Food, drink and tobacco process operatives



Interesting Cases of the Quarter

Martin Seed

(Consultant and Honorary Senior Lecturer in Occupational Medicine at UK NHS & The University of Manchester)



As the first wave of the UK Covid-19 epidemic settled there was an increase in THOR reporter activity though case numbers still remain significantly below normal. Nevertheless there have been interesting examples that illustrate some of the potential direct and indirect consequences of Covid-19 on worker health. Covid-19 itself was attributed to work in five OPRA reports, all in the healthcare sector. There was one SWORD case report of Covid-19 which was attributed to the work of an anaesthetist. Six cases with worsening pre-existing asthma and/or skin conditions and three cases of new onset dermatoses were attributed to wearing of surgical face masks in OPRA reports. NHS occupational physicians will be only too aware of the difficulties of being asked to adjudicate on 'mask intolerance'.

“Pandemic related ergonomic risks are being reported to THOR”.

An EPIDERM case of allergic contact dermatitis was attributed to limonene and linalool in a fitness instructor with the affected sites corresponding to sites of contact with workplace mats that had been sprayed with antibacterial spray. Pandemic related ergonomic risks are being reported to THOR. A case of work related upper limb disorder (type 2) was attributed by an OPRA reporter to increased mouse use in a speech and language therapist who had to change job role during the pandemic. In a case reported to THOR-GP the likely cause of headache affecting an Information Technology (IT) worker was reported as poor computer/desk positioning since working from home during lockdown. Working from home often takes place without a DSE assessment. It also adds to the work pressures faced by IT workers as illustrated by an OPRA report of adjustment disorder (anxiety) in an IT assistant attributed to the need for IT help from a huge increase in workers from home.

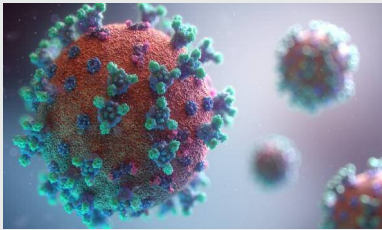
Perhaps something to be mindful of as we pick up the phone to IT services during moments of despair!

Events

The 75th Annual Lane Lecture 2020

This year's Lane Lecture was held on the 18th of November and was presented by Professor Cath Noakes with a talk titled 'Droplets and Aerosols – the complex physics of respiratory disease transmission'.

Professor Noakes discussed some of the engineering and modelling approaches that can be used to understand mechanisms



for transmission and design mitigation strategies, including the interactions between people and the environment, the role of ventilation and the potential application for technologies such as germicidal UV disinfection.

The lecture is available via YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EudssG9jkj4>

The PowerPoint slides can be viewed via the link:

<http://research.bmh.manchester.ac.uk/epidemiology/COEH/aboutus/lectures/>

About Professor Cath Noakes

Cath Noakes is Professor of Environmental Engineering for Buildings at the University of Leeds. She is a member of the Government's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) and has recently been given an OBE for services to the COVID-19 response.

Recent Publications to THOR

Mason, Howard J; Carder, Melanie; Money, Annemarie; Evans, Gareth; Seed, Martin; Agius, Raymond; van Tongeren, Martie, **Occupation asthma and its causation in the UK seafood processing industry**, Annals of Work Exposures and Health 2020; in press. doi: 10.1093/annweh/wxaa055

Contacts

We hope you enjoy this quarter's newsletter. If you have any further questions about any of our schemes, then please get in touch via one of the contacts listed below.

we are always happy to hear from you.

Scheme	Email
EPIDERM SWORD	laura.byrne@manchester.ac.uk
OPRA THOR-GP	susan.taylor@manchester.ac.uk
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