



Information for Rail Safety Workers

FACT SHEET



**More information
on the new Standard**

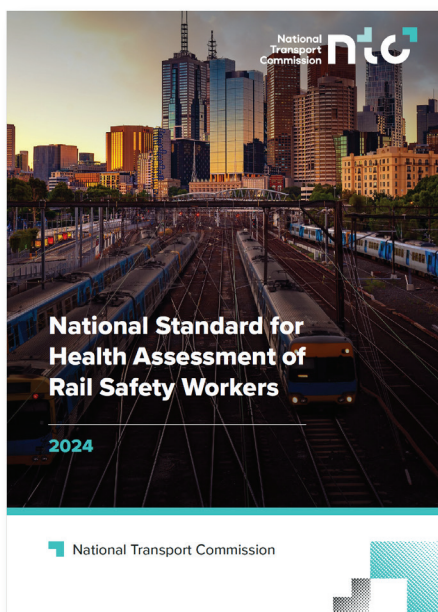
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National Standard for Health Assessment of Rail Safety Workers 2024

Your health is important for rail safety

Working in rail can be challenging. It can involve complex tasks requiring perception, good judgement, responsiveness and sound physical capability. These can be affected by some health conditions.

This fact sheet contains important information on how rail safety health assessments work, and what this means for you as a rail safety worker. It also explains changes resulting from the recent review of the [National Standard for Health Assessment of Rail Safety Workers 2024](#) (the Standard).



Under the Rail Safety National Law (RSNL), rail operators are required to monitor and manage rail safety worker health in line with the Standard. The Standard supports a consistent and fair approach underpinned by established worker protections, such as privacy and equal opportunity.

About the Standard

The Standard was first developed by the National Transport Commission (NTC) in 2004 to guide rail transport operators in managing the risks posed by the ill-health of rail safety workers.

The Standard describes the requirements for health assessments conducted throughout workers' employment and applies to all rail transport operators and rail safety workers nationally.

Application of the Standard supports early identification and management of health conditions, which proactively protects rail safety as well as supporting workers' ongoing employment.

The NTC reviews the Standard regularly to ensure it keeps up with medical advances and changes in the rail environment. The latest review was completed in 2024.

The review involved extensive consultation with stakeholders including unions, the rail industry, medical professionals, government transport departments and rail safety regulators. The NTC formally consulted with the Rail, Tram and Bus Union and the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union during the review. We also heard from the wider community.

When does the 2024 edition of the Standard come into effect?

The 2024 edition of the Standard was released on 2 October 2024 and can be found on the NTC website.

All health assessments conducted from the 11 November 2024 must be conducted according to the 2024 edition of the Standard.



What has changed for workers under the new Standard?

Changes to the assessment and management of health conditions

The changes to the Standard reflect changes in medical approaches to assessing and managing health conditions that may impact safety. They also improve coordination and integration with other health monitoring requirements, including those for occupational health and safety.

Consideration has been given to minimising unnecessary specialist review when a health condition is already being managed by the worker's general practitioner.

Following are the main changes, grouped under the relevant medical conditions.

Assessment of cardiac risk

- You will no longer need to fast for pathology testing.
- There is a new version of the [Australian Cardiovascular Risk Calculator](#), which is applied to assess the risk of Category 1 workers having a cardiac event in the next five years.
 - The improved assessment tool is more accurate in identifying people at risk of heart disease and stroke.
 - If you are under 30 years old, you will not require a cardiac risk score.
 - If you are assessed as being at high risk you will be referred for assessment by a cardiologist who will determine what investigations and treatment are appropriate. You can choose the cardiologist with input from your treating general practitioner.
- If you have an existing cardiac condition, exercise stress testing will no longer be routinely required and will only be conducted on the advice of the treating cardiologist.

Diabetes

- Category 1 workers no longer need to fast for diabetes pathology testing.
- Category 2 workers will be screened for diabetes via a urine glucose test, which also does not require fasting.

- Category 1 and 2 workers with diabetes that is satisfactorily controlled may be able to be reviewed by their general practitioner or Authorised Health Professional, rather than their specialist.

Hearing

- There is no change in the fitness for duty criteria for hearing.
- However, all workers with hearing loss will be referred to the rail transport operator's hearing conservation program.
- Workers requiring hearing aids will have their needs individually assessed.

Musculoskeletal conditions

- There are no changes to the musculoskeletal criteria for fitness for duty.
- Changes in the forms provided to examining doctors prompt them to consider the specific musculoskeletal requirements of each job.
- You should make sure your examining doctor understands the requirements of your job.

Neurodevelopmental disorders

- There is new content in the Standard to address neurodevelopmental conditions such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).
- Category 1 and 2 workers with these conditions are required to declare them in the Health Questionnaire.
- The assessment of these conditions in terms of fitness for duty is based on the impacts on rail safety work, not on the diagnosis. This means that if you have one of these conditions you will be individually assessed as to the potential impact on rail safety work.

Sleep disorder screening

- Category 1 and 2 workers will be screened using the STOP-Bang questionnaire to determine their risk of obstructive sleep apnoea. This provides a more standardised approach to screening.
- This is in addition to the Epworth Sleepiness Scale.
- Those found to be at risk will be referred for a sleep study.



Vision

- If you have a stable vision condition you will be categorised as Fit for Duty Unconditional if you meet the visual acuity and visual fields criteria.
- If you have a progressive vision condition and currently meet the fitness for duty criteria you will be Fit for Duty Subject to Review to enable monitoring of the progression of your condition.
- The category Fit for Duty Conditional no longer applies as a separate category, but if you require corrective lenses you will still need to wear them during work.

Category 3 workers

- Category 3 workers will be subject to more detailed medical criteria for a range of health conditions that may affect their safety on and around the track. These changes are based on the existing RISSB Technical note, which has been in effect since 2019.

Medicinal cannabis

- You will notice the Standard clearly states that 'prescribed drugs' (defined as delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), methylamphetamine (methamphetamine), 3,4-methylenedioxymethylamphetamine (MDMA)) are banned substances, even if prescribed legally by a health professional.
- The Standard provides additional content regarding medically prescribed medicines, including medicinal cannabis.

Does the new Standard make it more difficult to pass your health assessment?

The health assessments are designed to monitor your health so that problems are identified, treated and reviewed appropriately, and so that you can continue to work and perform your tasks safely.

Ultimately, it means that you can expect to benefit personally from improved health monitoring while ensuring the safety of the rail network.

The updated health assessments may be more effective in identifying health problems, but this doesn't necessarily mean you will fail the assessment or that you will be found unfit for duty.

Any condition that is identified will be assessed and managed at an early stage and may be monitored more regularly to ensure your continued fitness for duty.

Changes to the administration of health assessments

While the Standard has always required that workers be given reasonable notice of health assessments, it now clearly defines a minimum notice period for routine health assessments required under the Standard.

Minimum notice period

For Periodic Health Assessments or non-urgent Triggered Health Assessments associated with a previous Fit for Duty Subject to Review determination, the minimum notice period is 10 working days, unless varied via mutual agreement between the operator and worker. **This is a new requirement.**

Triggered Health Assessments due to sudden concerns about your health, such as following a sudden loss of consciousness, are not subject to minimum notice periods as it is important that your health is assessed as soon as possible.

Employers must also consider the needs of shift workers when scheduling appointments.

More about the health assessment system



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When are health assessments required?

The health assessments required under the Standard aim to support your fitness for duty throughout your employment, including:

- **At pre-placement or when changing to roles with a higher classification:** These assessments make sure your health and fitness match the requirements of the tasks you are going to perform.
- **Periodically throughout your employment:** These assessments aim to monitor your health at regular intervals during your employment to identify conditions that might affect rail safety. The frequency of these Periodic Health Assessments will vary depending on your risk category and age.
- **When required due to concerns about your health:** Triggered Health Assessments may be prompted at any time between routine Periodic Health Assessments. The assessment may be initiated by your employer, the Authorised Health Professional or by you. These assessments respond to health concerns arising during your employment and ensure there is ongoing monitoring of any health conditions that may impact your safety or the safety of the rail system.

Triggered Health Assessments include the more frequent assessments that may be required when you are assessed as Fit for Duty Subject to Review, as well as assessments relating to injury management, return to work and rehabilitation.

Are health assessments required for return to work after episodes of temporary illness or injury?

Safety may be affected by long-term medical conditions as well as temporary illness or injury.

The need for a health assessment for return to work will depend on the nature and severity of the condition/injury and the worker's role.

For example, a fractured limb may or may not require a fitness for duty (Triggered) assessment for return to work, depending on the potential impact on the worker's particular task. It may, for example, not affect the work of a train controller, but fitness may need to be confirmed for a shunter.

How do rail safety health assessments interface with workers' compensation and rehabilitation assessments?

Under the RSNL, the rail transport operator needs to be satisfied that you meet the Standard when returning to work after any illness or injury, whether it is work-related or non-work related.

Therefore, you may need to undergo a Triggered Health Assessment with an Authorised Health Professional as part of your return to normal duties.

While your own general practitioner and other health professionals may be managing your return to work under worker's compensation, they cannot determine your fitness for duty under the Standard unless they are an Authorised Health Professional (see below).

Who can conduct health assessments under the Standard?

Only health professionals who have been authorised according to the Standard can conduct the health assessments. They must be specifically trained and registered and are required to undertake annual refresher training through the AHP Program.

The AHP Program portal contains a list of Authorised Health Professionals, which is publicly accessible.

Why do different workers have different assessments?

The level of health assessment is matched to your rail safety work risk category. There are four risk categories:

Safety Critical categories:

- **Category 1 Safety Critical Worker:** This applies if your work requires high levels of attentiveness and where sudden incapacity or collapse may result in a serious incident affecting the public or the rail network.
- **Category 2 Safety Critical Worker:** This applies if your work requires high levels of attentiveness, but fail-safe mechanisms or the nature of your duties ensure sudden incapacity or collapse does not affect safety of the rail network.



Non-safety Critical categories:

- **Category 3 Worker:** This applies if your work is not safety critical, but you work around the track in an uncontrolled environment and may be at risk from moving rolling stock. You are required to undertake health assessments as you must take reasonable care for your own safety and the safety of others.
- **Category 4 Worker:** This applies if you work around the track but in a controlled environment and are not at risk from moving rolling stock. You are not required to have health assessments under the Standard. This category also includes workers who do not work around the track.

If you are found to be unfit in one category, you may be suitable for work in a lower risk category of work.

How does the health assessment process work?

Notification of a health assessment

Your employer must notify you in writing when you are required to attend a health assessment under the Standard.

Minimum notice period

You will be provided with reasonable notice to attend a health assessment. For Periodic Health Assessments or non-urgent Triggered Health Assessments associated with a previous Fit for Duty Subject to Review determination, the minimum notice period is 10 working days, unless varied via mutual agreement between the operator and worker.

What you need to take to an assessment

You should have the relevant specialist reports and other requirements organised well before your assessment is due, noting that specialist appointments often need to be booked several weeks in advance.

Notification details

Your employer must provide you with the following information:

- The nature and purpose of the assessment.
- The consequences of not turning up for the assessment or not cooperating in the assessment process.
- Your obligations to provide accurate information to the Authorised Health Professional.
- The appointment details including date, time, duration and location, the practice contact details and who will conduct the assessment.
- The requirements for tests and reports, and what else to bring to the assessment (photo ID, list of current medications, glasses and hearing aids, etc).
- Advice regarding information and report disclosure including who will receive the report, how health information will be managed and how you can access your health information.

This information will be outlined in the Worker Notification and Health Questionnaire.

Health Questionnaire

You need to complete Part B of the Worker Notification and Health Questionnaire before your health assessment. The Health Questionnaire asks about your experience at work, general health and medical history, and includes questionnaires about mental health, sleep, alcohol, tobacco and other drug use. The examining doctor will use these responses to guide the clinical examination. This information will not be shared with your employer.

The Health Questionnaire must be completed for all Periodic Health Assessments. It may or may not be needed for Triggered Health Assessments.

Fit for duty record and report

The examining doctor will complete the Record for Health Professional as a detailed clinical record of your assessment. The doctor keeps this record and does not share it with your employer.

The examining doctor will provide a fitness for duty determination in Part B of the Request and Report Form. This summarises the fitness for duty outcome but does not provide any details about your medical condition. The doctor must provide you with a copy of this form and must also explain the outcomes and implications of your health assessment.



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Other considerations

Every rail safety worker needs access to information on worker health assessments. The rail operator should consider language, culture and other considerations that may impact your ability to participate effectively in the health assessment.

These may be addressed in collaboration with the Authorised Health Professional – for example, through an interpreter or support person.

You should also get advice from your employer on how to make a complaint.

If you need specialist medical input for a medical condition, the Authorised Health Professional may suggest a specialist. However, you can also seek advice from your treating general practitioner regarding the selection of a specialist.

What are the fitness for duty categories?

The result of your health assessment is expressed using standard categories to ensure consistency.

There are now four fitness for duty categories:

- Fit for Duty Unconditional
- Fit for Duty Subject to Review
- Temporarily Unfit for Duty
- Permanently Unfit for Duty.

You will no longer be categorised 'Fit for Duty Conditional'.

If you have a stable vision condition you will be categorised as Fit for Duty Unconditional.

If you have a permanent or progressive condition that may cause you to be unfit for your current rail safety duties for 12 months or more, you will be categorised as 'Permanently Unfit'. This is an existing requirement, but the definition has been clarified in the revised Standard. You do not have to be unfit for duty for 12 months before being assessed as Permanently Unfit for Duty.

The examining doctor will let you know about job modification and alternative duties.

What if you disagree with a health assessment outcome or you have another complaint?

You have a right to a fair and transparent health assessment process and you should have access to information about how to make a complaint. This should be provided by the rail transport operator and the Authorised Health Professional conducting your assessment.

Under the revised Standard, responsibilities for establishing and communicating complaints processes are outlined (Section 2.6), including general complaints and those associated with potential data breaches.

Under the revised Standard you can also seek an opinion from another Authorised Health Professional if there is a dispute.

Complaints that cannot be resolved through internal processes may be escalated. There are contact details at the end of this fact sheet.

How is your health information managed?

What will your employer know about you and your health?

Your privacy is important, and the Standard describes how your information can and can't be used.

In step with privacy laws, personal health information remains confidential between you and your examining doctor. The only information that passes from the examining doctor to your employer is a report regarding your fitness for duty (Part B of the Request and Report Form). The report will identify the outcome in terms of one of the four categories described above.

Medical information is not provided to your employer. If your organisation has a Chief Medical Officer (CMO), they may review your health record and/or speak to the examining doctor regarding your overall management. Any information received by the CMO must be kept confidential and cannot be discussed with or accessed by any other person in your organisation.



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Questions

For general, operator or worker questions: enquiries@ntc.gov.au

For questions about Authorised Health Professionals: contact@ahpprogram.com.au

Complaints

For complaints about an Authorised Health Professional: contact@ahpprogram.com.au

For general complaints: contact@onrsr.com.au

For complaints about medical misconduct: [Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency \(AHPRA\)](https://www.ahpra.gov.au/).

Feedback

For feedback on the 2024 edition of the Standard: [Microsoft Forms link](#).

Is your health assessment report shareable between employers?

Portability of your fitness for duty report means that you don't have to undergo repeated health assessments for multiple employers. It is your choice whether your fitness for duty report can be shared. **It can only be shared with your written consent.**

How can you access your health assessment records?

You are entitled to access your health records under Australian privacy law and health records legislation in your state and territory. **You can do this by making a direct request to the medical practice of the Authorised Health Professional conducting your assessment.** They may ask you to complete a written request.



ONRSR

<https://www.onrsr.com.au/contact-us>

New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory: **1800 572 077**

Queensland: **1800 531 982**

South Australia, Northern Territory and Tasmania: **(08) 8406 1580**

Victoria: **1800 318 244**

Western Australia: **1800 433 038**



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[Consultation report Summary of changes Forms](#)

2024 edition of the Standard