

The complete guide to first aid at work



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Introduction

According to the [HSE Kinds of accident statistics in Great Britain 2021](#) an estimated 441,000 people sustained non-fatal injuries at work, according to self-reports. On top of this, 142 employees were killed while at work

While these statistics clearly demonstrate the importance of making arrangements for first aid within the workplace, there is still a common misunderstanding of what provisions are required in order to create a safe working environment.

This is because first aid at work regulations can be confusing. For duty holders who are tasked with maintaining health and safety in the workplace, understanding what your responsibilities are and what actions you need to take can be difficult - especially when the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) can be vague about them.

That's why we have created this guide. Covering everything from what the first aid at work regulation means and how to be compliant, to how to choose first-aiders and a first aid at work training course, this guide will provide you with the information you need to create a better, safer and compliant workplace.



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First aid at work regulations

First aid at work regulations

The first aid at work legislation, or [The Health and Safety \(First-Aid\) Regulations 1981](#) were introduced as part of the [Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974](#), with the aim to set out the key aspects of first aid that all employers need to address in order to keep their employees safe in the workplace.

As stated in the legislation, employers are legally required to ensure that their employees receive immediate attention if they are injured or taken ill at work, by providing “adequate and appropriate” equipment, facilities and personnel.

Who do first aid regulations apply to?

The first aid at work regulations apply to all businesses. While those with fewer than five employees and the self-employed do not need to keep a record of their first aid activities, they are still required to have adequate first aid provisions in place.

This means that regardless of business scope or size, duty holders have a responsibility to put the necessary first aid resources in place to be compliant with [HSE](#) regulations.



What is an employer's responsibility under these regulations?

The Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations 1981 are ambiguous about what exactly is required of duty holders in their unique working environment. Therefore, it is the duty holder's responsibility to determine the exact first aid provisions needed based on the specific workplace environment.

The HSE states that the minimum first aid provisions your company must have in place are:

- **An appointed person**

If your first aid needs assessment indicates that a first-aider is not required, as specified by [HSE](#), the “minimum requirement is to appoint a person to take charge of first aid arrangements” and this person does not need to have a formal first aid qualification.

The main responsibilities of the appointed person will include: being the first point of contact for other employees regarding first aid provisions, ensuring that the first aid kit is up to date and appropriately stocked, writing and keeping accident records and calling the emergency services in the event of an incident.

- **A first aid kit**

While there are no specific requirements for what needs to be in the first aid kit itself, it is strongly recommended that the kit you have aligns with [British Standards](#). However, your first aid needs assessment may identify unique risks that need further resources, so your kit will need to be suitably stocked to meet those requirements.

- **First aid information**

It is the responsibility of the duty holder to inform all employees of the provisions in place for first aid. This includes identifying the person responsible for all first aid provisions (appointed person or first-aider) and where the first aid kits are located.

Will I need an appointed person or a first-aider?

While an appointed person takes charge of first aid provisions, they aren't usually trained to perform first aid. Therefore, where the first aid needs assessment identifies that having an appointed person isn't adequate due to a higher risk environment, duty holders will need to provide first-aiders.

A first-aider is a nominated employee that has received a formal first aid qualification, such as [first aid at work](#), [emergency first aid at work](#) or any other training course of a similar level. Unlike the appointed person, a first-aider is able to deliver first aid to the level they are qualified. The number of first-aiders needed will be determined by the outcome of your [first aid needs assessment](#).

*** Note:** In select circumstances, an appointed person can provide emergency cover if a first aider is unexpectedly absent.

Source:
[Choosing an appointed person or first-aider](#)

The main differences between an appointed person and a first-aider are outlined in the table below:

Responsibilities	Appointed person	First-aider
Managing first aid equipment and resources	✓	✓
Taking charge when an employee becomes injured or ill	✓	✓
Calling the emergency services if they are needed	✓	✓
Making an initial assessment of an injury or illness	✗	✓
Delivering appropriate first aid to the injured or ill person until help arrives	✗ *	✓
Maintaining injury or illness records	✓	✓

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First aid at work needs assessment

First aid at work needs assessment

The [HSE](#) cannot tell you the specific provisions you should make for first aid because there is no one-size-fits-all approach to a first aid procedure.

Employers are best qualified to understand the conditions of their workplace and decide what provisions need to be in place. Therefore, in order to decide exactly what you need to provide, you should undertake a first-aid needs assessment.

What needs to be included in a first aid needs assessment?

A first aid needs assessment should take into consideration the specific conditions of your working environment, your workforce and any hazards or risks that could be present. Therefore, when assessing what first aid provisions you should have in place, [HSE guidelines](#) strongly suggest you consider.

- The degree of hazard associated with your work activities and environment.
- How many employees your organisation has.
- Injuries and illnesses that have previously occurred in the workplace.
- Any factors that may affect first-aid provision (inexperienced employees, remote workplaces, absences of the first-aider etc).

Once these have been taken into account, you should also assess the following factors:

- If you have travelling, remote or lone workers.
- The distribution of your workforce.
- Whether your employees work on shared or multi-occupancy sites.
- If you require first-aid provision for non-employees (e.g. members of the public).
- Whether your site is in close proximity to emergency medical services.

However, HSE's suggestions are not exhaustive, and their guidelines also stress the need for individual assessment of the workplace to identify unique risks that require further first aid provision than an appointed person and first aid kit.

For example, if the duty holder of a factory with five hundred workers were to undertake a first aid needs assessment, they should take into account the unique risks posed by the environment (such as potentially dangerous equipment,) as well as other factors to decide what the adequate and appropriate first aid provisions are. Based on this, the outcome from the needs assessment could be that the factory requires multiple first-aiders and first aid kits.

For advice on completing a needs assessment, view our sample assessments below:

[Sample 1: High hazard, construction](#)

[Sample 2: High hazard, manufacturing](#)

[Sample 3: High hazard, supermarket](#)

[Sample 4: Low hazard, small office](#)

[Sample 5: Low hazard, hospitality](#)

What does 'adequate and appropriate' mean?

This term, which is used throughout The Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations 1981, means an employer must have a first aid procedure in place that matches the risk level identified in their first aid needs assessment. It must also be compliant with any [first aid legal requirements](#).

Adequate and appropriate provisions will ensure that employees and anyone else on-site is able to access first aid in the case of illness or injury - whether this is through the utilisation of a first aid kit or first-aider.



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First aid provisions

First aid at work regulations

When you have completed a first aid needs assessment, you will need to make sure you have the adequate and appropriate provisions in place to reflect the outcome. This is likely to include a first aid kit and first aid information.

What needs to be in a first aid kit?

As a minimum, HSE requires employers to provide a first aid kit - preferably one that is compliant with [BS 8599](#). However, because the HSE gives no mandatory list of items that need to be included, the decision of what the first aid kit should contain should be influenced by the outcome of your first aid needs assessment.

As a guide, [HSE](#) lists an example of what a first aid kit may include where the work activities are low risk:

- A leaflet giving general guidance on first aid
- At least twenty individually wrapped sterile plasters in assorted sizes that are appropriate to the type of work being undertaken (hypoallergenic plasters can be provided if necessary)
- Two sterile eye pads
- Two individually wrapped triangular bandages - preferably sterile
- Six safety pins
- Two large, sterile, individually wrapped unmedicated wound dressings
- Six medium-sized sterile individually wrapped unmedicated wound dressings
- At least three pairs of disposable gloves. HSE's leaflet '[Latex and You](#)' informs employers about the health problems that may occur if employees are exposed to natural latex rubber at work, which should be considered before equipping your first aid kit with gloves.

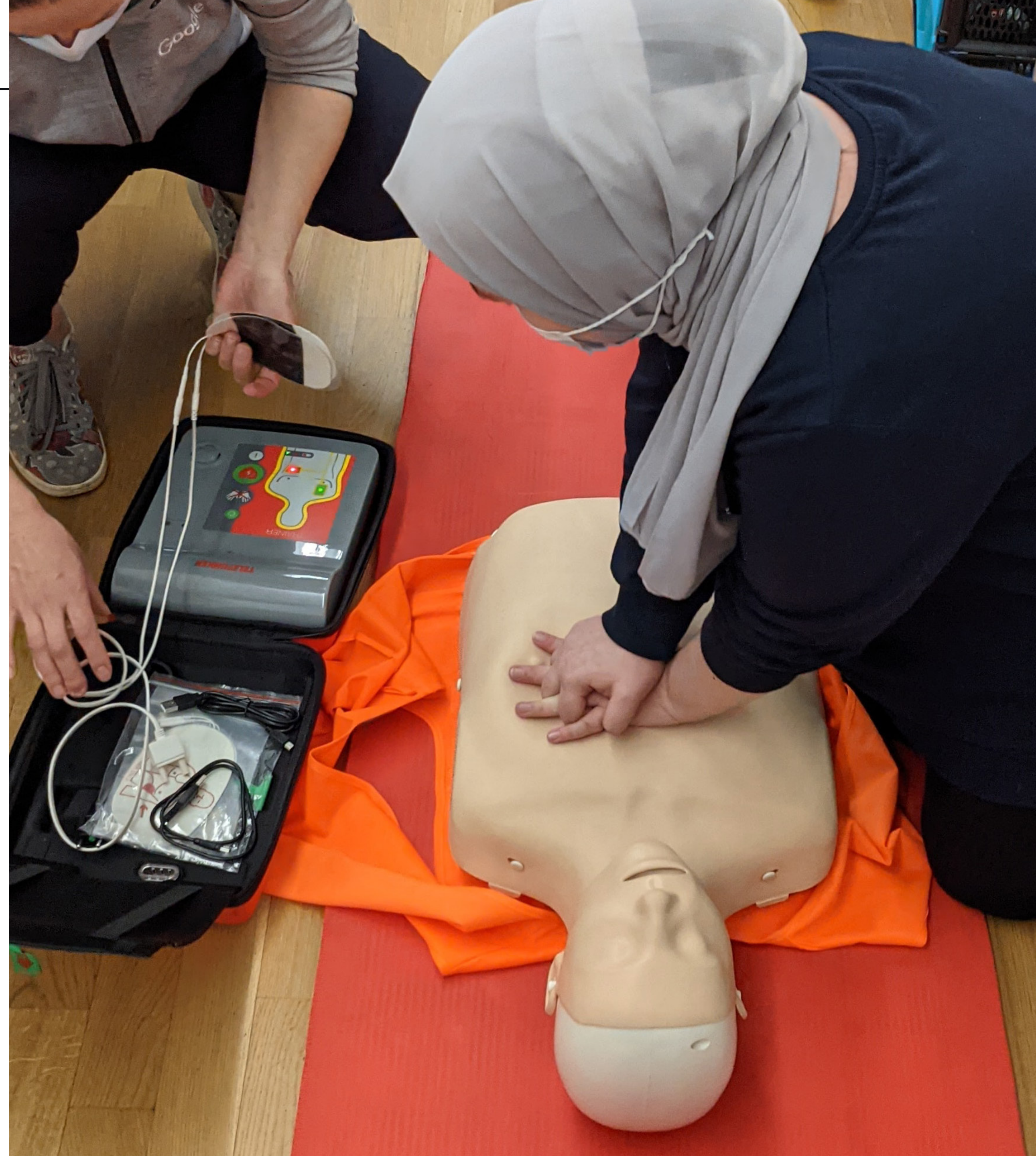
However, this is not a complete list of what your first aid kit should contain - especially if you have identified a higher risk level within your working environment. Additional risks outlined in your first aid needs assessment may require further resources, therefore you will need to add the appropriate provisions to the first aid kit to reflect this.

Whether you use a first aid kit that complies with BS 8599 or an alternative, more individualised kit, the contents should always reflect the outcome of your first-aid needs assessment.

What information do I need to provide for employees?

The [HSE's guide for employers](#) states that a workplace “must provide all employees with details of the first-aid arrangements”. This means that as a minimum, all employees should be aware of what the first aid procedure is, who the first-aider(s) are and where the first aid kit(s) is located.

Any information required beyond this is dependent on the outcome of your first aid needs assessment. For example, in many modern working environments, automated external defibrillators (AEDs) are often being added to a company's first aid procedure on site; meaning that under HSE guidelines, employers will have to provide employees with the location of AEDs should they be required.



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Choosing first-aiders

Choosing first-aiders

When the outcome of your first aid needs assessment identifies a need for first-aiders on site, you will need to decide which of your employees you will send on a first aid course to become qualified.

How do I choose a first-aider?

Choosing a first-aider is more than just a legal requirement - it could make a significant difference in saving someone's life. The duties of a first-aider can be physically and mentally demanding, therefore it is important to make the right choice.

When your first aid needs assessment identifies the requirement for first-aiders, there are a number of factors you should take into account when choosing employees to fulfil the role:

- **Willingness**

Is being a first-aiders something the employee actually wants to do? Is it something they can take pride in?

- **Capability**

Is the employee mentally able to fulfil the role? Are they calm and confident enough to act reasonably in the case of an emergency?

- **Ability**

Is the employee physically able to perform first aid?

- **Availability**

Can the employee fulfil the first-aiders role without it affecting their work?

It is also important to remember that you must have first-aiders on site regardless of annual leave, different shift patterns and absences - so bear this in mind when selecting employees to become qualified first-aiders. In the event of an unexpected absence, an appointed person is able to provide emergency cover within their role and competence.

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First aid at work training

First aid at work training

Once you have selected employees to become first-aiders, you must then ensure they are qualified, by selecting a [first aid at work training course](#) that is specific to the risks outlined in your first aid needs assessment.

Why is first aid at work training important?

Not every job is inherently dangerous, but every employer still has a responsibility to keep their employees safe under The [Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974](#). However, besides legal obligations, there are a number of reasons why first aid training is important, as well as offering a range of benefits for both the employer and the employees. Some of these include:

Benefits of first aid at work training for employers	Benefits of first aid at work training for employees
<div>Quick responses</div> <div>Employees qualified in first aid will be confident in the necessary steps to take during an emergency (such as when to alert emergency services) and their fast reaction time will reduce the chance of further injury.</div>	<div>Safety in the workplace</div> <div>The presence of first-aiders within your working environment is reassuring for other employees.</div>
<div>Reduced risk</div> <div>You can reduce the chance of workplace incidents through first aid awareness.</div>	<div>Increased safety consciousness</div> <div>Trained first-aiders can promote safety to other employees, which can reduce the risk of workplace incidents.</div>
<div>Safe working environment</div> <div>First-aiders can help provide a safer and more positive work environment where employees feel like they are cared about.</div>	<div>Potential for learning</div> <div>Trained first-aiders get the chance to learn new skills that they can be proud of.</div>

By having trained first-aiders, you are able to keep your employees safe. Effective first aid can:

- Reduce pain for the injured or ill where possible
- Prevent further serious injury
- Preserve life before emergency services arrive

Businesses therefore need to have trained first-aiders on site when their first aid needs assessment requires it. Not only could you [face serious penalties](#) if your first aid provisions are deemed inadequate, but you also risk endangering your employees too.

A study conducted by the [University of Manchester](#) found that up to 59% of deaths from injury across the UK could have been prevented if first aid was administered before the emergency medical services arrived. [The Resuscitation Council](#) (UK) also states that after a cardiac arrest, every minute without CPR and defibrillation reduces the chance of survival by up to 10%.

This research suggests that having qualified first-aiders on site who are able to respond and intervene immediately when an accident occurs can directly increase the chances of survival. As well as ensuring you are compliant, having trained first-aiders on site lets your employees know you are serious about their wellbeing.

How do I choose a first aid at work training course?

In order to become a qualified first-aider, employees will have to undertake a first aid at work course that is appropriate for the concerns outlined in the first aid needs assessment.

Many companies require first-aiders to learn first aid skills covered in a one day training session, such as an [emergency first aid at work](#) course. However, if your first aid needs assessment identifies a requirement for additional training, for example if you have employees with



a medical condition, a more in-depth course - such as a three day [first aid at work course](#) - is more appropriate.

For those companies with additional first aid requirements (such as companies in an industry with unique hazards), a bespoke course is also an option.

How do I choose a first aid at work training course?

Since October 2013, [HSE](#) no longer approves first aid training organisations, meaning that those who were formerly ‘approved’ by HSE to deliver First Aid at Work Training can no longer claim to do so.

While this gives companies more flexibility over which provider to choose, it also makes the process of doing so much more difficult.

Qualifications

The first aid trainer delivering a first aid at work course to your team should have a number of qualifications that show they have the necessary knowledge and ability required to teach first aid, as demonstrated by the list of appropriate qualifications outlined in this [HSE information sheet](#).

These include:

- A current, valid First Aid at Work (FAW) certificate, or;
- Registered as a doctor with the General Medical Council;
- Registered as a nurse with the Nursing and Midwifery Council;
- Registered as a paramedic with the Health and Care Professions Council.

Skills and competencies

If your first aid training provider has the necessary skills and competencies to deliver first aid training to an excellent standard, they will need to be able to demonstrate this by satisfying certain criteria set out by HSE in a [due diligence checklist](#). These include:

- The necessary qualifications expected of trainers and assessors.
- Monitoring and quality assurance systems in place.
- Excellent teaching standards of first-aid practice.
- Appropriate syllabus content.
- Relevant certifications.

Furthermore, according to HSE’s [Selecting a First Aid Training Provider: A Guide for Employers](#) (paragraph 23), training organisations should teach first aid at work in accordance with:

- Current guidelines published by the [Resuscitation Council](#) (UK); and
- The [current edition of the first-aid manual](#) of the Voluntary Aid Societies, which is co-authored by British Red Cross, St John Ambulance, and St Andrew’s First Aid; or
- Other published guidelines, provided they are in line with the two above or supported by a responsible body of medical opinion.

The first aid training provider must also provide evidence of a quality assurance process, which is where an unbiased designated person (with relevant first aid knowledge and a valid qualification in assessment) will examine and report on the skills of the first aid trainers. This should be done

What information do I need to provide for employees?

Ensuring compliance with first aid at work regulations and providing a safe working environment for your employees is an ongoing process - it doesn't end once your first-aiders are qualified.

This requires further actions which a duty holder must take to ensure that an excellent first aid procedure is maintained.

Firstly, whichever course your first-aiders complete, it is essential to remember that all first aid at work certificates are only valid for three years, which means your first-aiders will have to undertake a [requalification course](#).

On top of this, [HSE](#) also strongly recommends that first-aiders undertake annual refresher training, over half a day, during any three-year certification period, in order to prevent skill fade and keep first-aiders up to date with the latest first aid knowledge.

You should also ensure that first aid procedures are being followed in day-to-day business operations. This includes keeping employees up to date with any information regarding first aid and making sure that first aid kits are up to date and fully stocked at all times. This will help you ensure compliance with [The Health and Safety \(First-Aid\) Regulations 1981](#) and provide a safe, positive environment for your employees where they feel protected.



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Next Steps

Next Steps

In this guide we have considered everything you need to know about first aid at work - from a breakdown of the regulations you need to comply with, to choosing an appropriate training course for your business.

So what are the key takeaways?

For many companies, maintaining an excellent safety standard throughout the workplace is essential, and it begins with a good first aid procedure. It is important to begin by conducting a [first aid needs assessment](#) to determine what first aid provisions you need to have in place. By doing this, you can anticipate and plan for the various risks associated with your individual workplace and identify the need for first-aiders.

Choosing an appropriate [first aid at work training course](#) is the next step to ensuring a compliant, safe workplace. Practical, confidence-building first aid training will ensure that your first-aiders are appropriately qualified for the incidents they may encounter. Not only can confident, prepared first-aiders reduce the chance of workplace incidents through first aid awareness, they can directly improve the chance of survival in the case of a serious injury, which makes your workplace a safer environment where your employees are protected.

Find the right first aid at work course for you.

Helpful Resources

[Basic advice on first aid at work](#)

[British Red Cross Training](#)

[British Standards Website](#)

[First aid \(HSE\)](#)

[First aid at work: Your questions answered](#)

[First aid needs assessment \(HSE\)](#)

[Guidance on The Health and Safety \(First-Aid\) Regulations 1981](#)

[HSE - Latex and You](#)

[HSE Penalties Guidance](#)

[Selecting a First-aid Training Provider: A guide for employers](#)

[The Health and Safety \(First-Aid\) Regulations 1981 \(Legislation\)](#)

[The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 \(Legislation\)](#)

[The Resuscitation Council \(UK\)](#)

Why choose British Red Cross Training?

From small businesses to multinational organisations, British Red Cross Training is the chosen first aid training provider for over 100,000 UK customers. As the standard setters for first aid training, we have over 35 years' experience of delivering vital training to help make workplaces of all sizes a safer place.

Our training courses help our wider work, with all operating surplus going into the British Red Cross' Charity Fund, helping us to create the greatest possible impact for people in crisis – whoever and wherever they are.

Train with a name you can trust.

Want to know more about mental health training?

Download our free guide for insight into what mental health training is, how it works, and what British Red Cross Training can offer your business.

[Download my copy](#)