

# Home care – Vacuuming

## What is the problem?

The task of vacuuming is the most commonly reported cause of musculoskeletal injuries for workers performing home care duties.

## What are the risks?

Workers may be at risk of injuries from strains to the back, neck, shoulders and wrists when pushing, pulling, bending and lifting.

The frequency of these actions and the time it takes to complete the task can also increase the risk of these injuries.

The common sources of risk include:

- vacuum equipment that is in poor working condition, not suitable for the task (too heavy, wand not height adjustable), stored in an inaccessible location or at an unsafe height or is difficult to empty
- surfaces that make it difficult to push and pull the vacuum cleaner (eg thick pile carpet)
- lifting the vacuum up stairs
- insufficient time to complete the task
- performing other tasks in addition to vacuuming that require the same, or similar, actions (eg mopping or sweeping)
- moving furniture, rugs, mats and other items in preparation for area to be cleaned.

These issues should all be considered during the initial assessment of the client's needs and if they pose a risk, they must be controlled prior to the first service visit by the home care worker.

## What are solutions to the problems?

Implement a system to regularly seek information from the worker to check if their work environment, tasks or client's needs have changed, or need to change.

Home care workers should have an easy system to report any changes or safety issues to their employer. If changes have been made or need to be made, employers should complete a re-assessment of the worker's tasks and environment. Fix any safety issues as soon as possible so the worker's and client's needs are safely met.

The risk of injury can be reduced or eliminated by the following safety measures:

## Vacuum equipment

- Ensure the service provider develops and maintains a list of preferred equipment
- Vacuum cleaners should:
  - be fit for the purpose (appropriate for floor surface)
  - be in good working order
  - be regularly maintained
  - be easy to move (lightweight, functional castors)
  - have an adjustable wand length to enable worker to carry out task in an upright position
  - have a suitable variety of fittings
  - have easy-to-change fittings
  - have good suction with an adjustable vent
  - be easily accessible and stored at a safe height
  - be easy to empty.

## Vacuum task

- Avoid vacuuming stairs that require the repeated lifting of the vacuum cleaner – or use suitable lightweight stick vacuum cleaner.
- Ensure adequate time is assigned to complete the task.
- Ensure tasks involving similar movements (eg mopping, sweeping and vacuuming) are not performed for more than 30 minutes at a time. Rotate to other tasks that require the use of different body movements (eg tidying, dusting, cleaning bathrooms or wiping benches).
- Employees should be trained in vacuuming techniques for different floor surfaces and areas.

## Moving furniture, rugs and mats

- Ensure vacuuming does not occur where heavy furniture, rugs or mats need to be moved.
- Ensure long/large mats are rolled out to expose the surface requiring vacuuming. The mat should not be lifted.
- Ensure heavy furniture is arranged to allow access around four sides (or at least three sides). If not, only the exposed floor surfaces should be vacuumed.
- Furniture may be fitted with lockable castors or glides to prevent lifting if this does not create additional risks to the client or worker.

# A Health and Safety Solution

## The problem



Vacuum cleaner wand length is short resulting in awkward posture.

## The solution



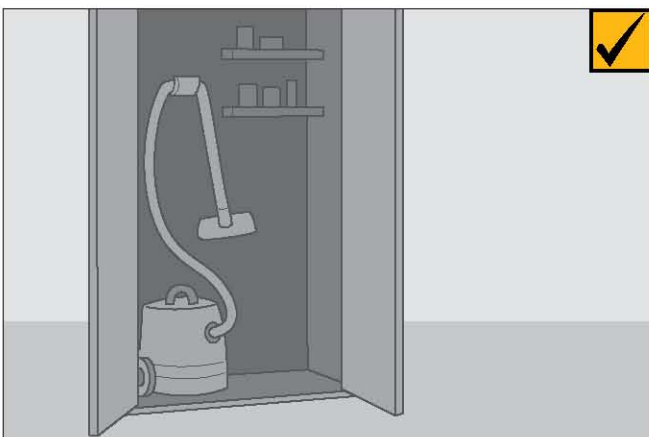
Worker is able to complete task in an upright position as wand length can be adjusted to worker's height.

## The problem



Access to the vacuum cleaner is blocked by other objects. Vacuum cleaner has to be lifted out of storage for use.

## The solution



Vacuum cleaner is located close to ground level reducing the need to lift. Access to the vacuum is clear.

## Further Information

### WorkSafe Advisory Service

Toll-free 1800 136 089

Email [info@worksafe.vic.gov.au](mailto:info@worksafe.vic.gov.au)

[worksafe.vic.gov.au](http://worksafe.vic.gov.au)

### Related WorkSafe Health and Safety Solutions

- Home care – Mopping
- Home care – Making beds
- Home care – Cleaning bathrooms
- Home care – Moving and lifting people in the home
- Home care – Showering or bathing people in the home
- Home care – Work related driving – Transporting people and/or moving equipment

### Related publications

- *Manual Handling Code of Practice, 2000*
- *Victorian Home Care Industry OHS Guide, October 2005*
- Available from [worksafe.vic.gov.au](http://worksafe.vic.gov.au) and [health.vic.gov.au/hacc](http://health.vic.gov.au/hacc)