

**Toilet Rights are  
Human Rights!**

Transport Workers'  
Sanitation Charter

# Health Risks

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Some health risks  
associated with lack  
of prompt access to  
appropriate toilets  
and washing facilities





## We manage by taking less fluids during working time”

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There are a number of health risks for workers (which may also impact on public safety and health) associated with lack of prompt access to toilet and washing facilities. This list is not exhaustive.

Many health issues are gender-related - for example, pregnancy, menstruation and menopause in women; and benign prostatic hypertrophy (BPH) in men, which increases with age. Apart from pregnancy, health conditions are not generally discussed in the workplace context, so their negative impact on individuals, and need to make provision at work, is likely to be ignored or overlooked by those who have not experienced the symptoms.

Older and disabled workers, including those suffering from conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome, may also be put at increased risk.

**“It’s not very easy for us ladies. Unlike our fellow drivers who are men, it’s easier to relieve themselves, even along hidden corridors within the city. For us women, we have to find parking near a restaurant or bar, but sometimes the owners don’t allow us to use their washrooms. It’s also risky because with this mode of transport; it’s very easy for someone to use a master key and drive off with your Tuktuk. We have a public toilet at the city bus stage – it’s never clean, there is no privacy at all, all kinds of people use these washrooms, and exposes us to hygiene related diseases. We manage by taking less fluids during working time, which is not healthy for our bodies...”**

*Woman tuktuk driver, Kenya*

# “Holding it in” and deliberate dehydration



I have to work  
6 hours without  
access to a toilet”

Many transport workers working long hours, including bus and train drivers, conductors (or “guards” in some states), truck drivers and workers in ticket offices feel obliged to “hold it in” until the end of their shift and to refrain from drinking liquids because they are denied access to toilets when they are at work.

Holding it in and deliberate dehydration can cause serious health problems or exacerbate existing medical problems.<sup>1</sup>

— weakness, dizziness;

<sup>1</sup> For more information see *Taking the P\*\**: the decline of the great British public toilet, Royal Society of Public Health (2019) <https://www.rsph.org.uk/about-us/news/taking-the-p-the-decline-of-the-great-british-public-toilet.html> accessed 27 August 2019

“Sometimes I have to work 6 hours without access to a toilet, which has taught me to drink very little. This unavoidable way of working caused many UTIs [urinary tract infections] and worse... since I started driving 15 years ago. One day, management... told me to have surgery or resign! I love my job and I do have a family to feed, so I had the surgery. The company say they want more women to drive trains but this doesn’t reflect in their actions. Nobody should have to suffer what I’ve been through. When I started they gave me a plastic box of wet wipes for ‘that time of the month!’”

*Woman train driver, Australia*

## THE ILL HEALTH EFFECTS OF DELIBERATE DEHYDRATION MAY INCLUDE:

- reduced physical performance;
- reduced short-term memory;
- depressed mood; less alert;
- constipation
- cystitis; urinary tract infections;
- increased risk of renal stones;
- headaches;
- stress; and
- heat stress – the risks of which will be exacerbated by working in hot conditions

# Gender-related health issues and the need to access sanitary, washing and welfare facilities

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## **MENSTRUATION**

Menstruating women often need to urinate more frequently due to the natural inflammation in the pelvic region as well as needing to wash, and to change sanitary dressings regularly.

## **PREGNANT WORKERS NEED FREQUENT ACCESS TO SAFE, CLEAN AND SECURE TOILETS, WASHING AND REST FACILITIES**

Pregnant workers may need to urinate more frequently during their pregnancy and may suffer from urinary incontinence, constipation, nausea and vomiting.

## **MENOPAUSE**

Though menopause is generally experienced by older women, younger women may experience early menopause. Symptoms include sweats and hot flushes, urogenital problems, for example increased frequency and urgency to urinate and irregular periods. Women transport workers are likely to need easy and frequent access to sanitary and washing facilities and cold drinking water.

## **HIGH TEMPERATURES**

There can be increased risks to women (and men) working in high temperatures, both inside and outside.

Global warming is a factor as temperatures in workplaces rise, exposing workers to the risk of heat stress (heat received in excess of that which the body can tolerate without suffering physiological impairment). Symptoms can include heat rash, heat cramps and heat exhaustion, and potentially fatal heatstroke.

In the case of pregnant women the body has to work harder to cool down both the mother and the unborn baby. Feeling warmer increases the need to wash more frequently, and a pregnant worker is more likely to get heat exhaustion or heat stroke sooner than a worker who is not pregnant. Pregnant women are more likely to become dehydrated.

## **BENIGN PROSTATIC HYPERTROPHY (BPH)**

BPH (a male medical condition mentioned above) can cause significant symptoms, including frequency, urgency, and nocturia (waking up at night to urinate).

## Violence – and stress

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Exposure to violence, including gender related violence such as sexual harassment and rape, is a particular occupational concern for women transport workers, which is exacerbated by the lack of appropriate safe and secure sanitary facilities.

In the case of pregnant women, both actual and threatened violence can pose a particular danger to their health, including the risk of early birth or miscarriage. In addition, pregnant women may be less able to remove themselves from danger.

Violence and the threat of violence is also linked to stress.



**My daughter said that it was so dark in there you had to kick the door to make sure that nobody was in there and going in and rob you.”**

*Bus operator, USA*

# Diseases

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## **LACK OF ACCESS TO WASHING FACILITIES**

This can put workers at risk of diseases including cholera, diarrhoeal diseases and other waterborne diseases; and occupational diseases resulting from exposure to chemicals and dusts.

Workers being able to access toilets and washing facilities is also essential to public health to prevent cross-contamination and the spread of disease.

## **WATERBORNE DISEASES**

High standards of personal hygiene and access to washing facilities are essential for all transport workers including pregnant women to avoid diseases such as cholera and other waterborne diseases.

## **MUSCULOSKELETAL DISORDERS (MSDs)**

Transport workers, particularly drivers, may remain for long periods in uncomfortable and static positions when they are at work, and are at risk from developing musculoskeletal disorders. Regular comfort breaks will assist with prevention. There is a link between MSDs and stress.



