

The incidence of work-related ill-health as reported to The Health and Occupation Research (THOR) network by physicians in the Republic of Ireland between 2005 and 2018.

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MAIN MESSAGES

- This is the latest annual report describing reporting activity to The Health and Occupation Research network for the Republic of Ireland (THOR-ROI).
- THOR-ROI comprises 4 surveillance schemes collecting data on work-related illness (WRI) in the Republic of Ireland (ROI); SWORD-ROI (chest physicians, data collection commenced 2005), EPIDERM-ROI (dermatologists, 2005), OPRA-ROI (occupational physicians, 2007) and THOR-GP in the ROI (general practitioners, 2015).
- At present, 12 dermatologists, 11 chest physicians, 30 OPs and 22 GPs participate in ROI -THOR, reporting incident cases that they believe to have been caused or aggravated by work.
- In total, 221 cases were reported in 2018 (OPs: 171, dermatologists: 24, chest physicians: 24, GPs: 2). Total ever reported (2005-2018) is 2557 (OPs: 1818, dermatologists: 497, chest physicians: 210, GPs: 32).
- OP case reports (2007-2018) were predominantly mental ill-health (53%) and musculoskeletal (34%) with smaller proportions of skin (9%), respiratory (2%) and 'other' WRI (3%). The majority (76%) of cases were reported in health and social care (mainly nurses) with a significant proportion also reported in transport (bus/train drivers) (13%).
- Dermatologist case reports (2005-2018) were predominantly contact dermatitis (CD) (96%), female (55% of CD cases) with a mean age (all CD cases) of 37 years. Frequently reported industries/occupations were healthcare (nurses), manufacturing (process operatives) and hairdressing and beauty, and agents included rubber, nickel, wet work and preservatives.
- Chest physician case reports (2005-2018) were predominantly asthma (32%), male (85%) with a mean age (all cases) of 57 years. Frequently reported industries/occupations were construction (labourers) and manufacturing, with cement/plaster/masonry dust the most frequently reported agent.
- The 22 GPs participating in the ROI have reported 32 cases since the scheme commenced data collection in 2015; musculoskeletal cases were reported most frequently (12 cases).
- Analysis of trends in incidence rates (based on reports to OPRA-ROI) suggest an overall decrease in incidence of total WRI of approximately 4% per year.

Summary of cases reported to THOR-ROI

Disease group	Reporting physicians	Number of cases	
		2018	2005 ^a -2018
Skin	Dermatologists	24	497 (20%)
	Occupational physicians	12	164 (7%)
	General practitioners	0	5 (<1%)
Respiratory	Chest physicians	24	210 (8%)
	Occupational physicians	4	36 (1%)
	General practitioners	0	0
Musculoskeletal	Occupational physicians	67	612 (23%)
	General practitioners	1	12 (<1%)
Mental ill-health	Occupational physicians	79	967 (38%)
	General practitioners	1	8 (<1%)
Other	Occupational physicians	11	54 (2%)
	General practitioners	0	7 (<1%)
Total cases^b	All physicians	221	2557

^a2007 for occupational physicians; 2015 for general practitioners

^ba case may have been assigned to more than one disease group (for example, musculoskeletal and mental ill-health)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND: Chest physicians, dermatologists, occupational physicians (OPs) and general practitioners (GPs) voluntarily report cases of work-related illness (WRI) to the 4 surveillance schemes which comprise The Health and Occupation Research (THOR) network, in the Republic of Ireland (THOR-ROI). This report describes the cases of WRI reported to THOR-ROI in the latest full calendar year (2018) and provides a summary of reporting activity since the commencement of reporting (2005 for dermatologists and chest physicians; 2007 for OPs; 2015 for GPs).

METHODS: Participating physicians were asked to provide anonymised case reports of incident cases seen during their reporting period. Cases reported to THOR-ROI were analysed by age, sex, occupation/industry, suspected causal agent and symptom onset. Incidence rates and trends in incidence rates were estimated for selected reporter groups/diagnoses.

RESULTS: The 75 physicians enrolled in THOR-ROI in 2018 (12 dermatologists, 11 chest physicians, 30 OPs and 22 GPs) reported a total of 221 cases (232 diagnoses) during 2018. Of these, 171 cases were reported by OPs to OPRA-ROI, 24 were reported by chest physicians to SWORD-ROI, 24 were reported by dermatologists to EPIDERM-ROI, and 2 cases of WRI were reported by GPs to THOR-GP-ROI. This brings the total cases ever reported (2005-2018) to 2557 case reports (dermatologists: 497, chest physicians: 210, OPs: 1818, GPs: 32 case reports). Analysis of trends in incidence rates (based on reports to OPRA-ROI) suggest an overall decrease in incidence of total WRI of approximately 4% per year.

CONCLUSION: THOR-ROI continues to provide the best overall source of data relating to medically attributed occupational disease incidence in the ROI, with nearly 2600 cases reported since the inception of the schemes. It is hoped that with continued funding and increased enrolment/participation in the schemes, and the promotion of THOR in the ROI, case numbers will increase. This would enable analyses of data by the various determinants of risk e.g. causal agent, precipitating event (mental ill-health) and task/movement (musculoskeletal), thus providing useful information for the HSA and ROI.