



HEALTH AND SAFETY
AUTHORITY



Guidance for Divers on Medical Certificates of Fitness to Dive



Our Vision:
Healthy, safe and
productive lives
and enterprises

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Diving) Regulations 2018 and 2019 (S.I. No. 254 of 2018 as amended by S.I. No. 180 of 2019), hereafter referred to as the Diving Regulations, a diver must not dive in a diving project unless they hold a valid certificate of medical fitness to dive issued by a medical examiner of divers. These guidelines provide information on the process and the certificates. The guidelines are aimed at divers who dive for work purposes, but the information will also be of interest to diving contractors and diving supervisors.
- 1.2 Working underwater can be a hostile work environment so fitness to dive is vital. It is important that the diver does not suffer from any medical condition that could affect the safety of themselves or other members of the dive team. In addition, the diver must not suffer from any medical condition that may be aggravated by diving, leading to an increased risk of long-term ill health effects.

- 2.1 Under Regulation 17(1) (a) of the Diving Regulations, a diver must not dive in a diving project unless they are fit to do so and have a valid certificate of medical fitness to dive. This requirement applies to any person who dives as defined in Regulation 3 of the Diving Regulations and includes any diver or person who is likely to be subject to hyperbaric conditions as routine rather than in an emergency.
- 2.2 The certificate of medical fitness to dive is issued by a “medical examiner of divers” in accordance with Regulation 19 of the Diving Regulations.
- 2.3 For a certificate of medical fitness to be valid it must be:
- in the name of that diver,
 - issued by a medical examiner of divers as approved by the Health and Safety Authority,
 - in date for the period of the diving project that the diver is participating in, and
 - in compliance with any conditions.
- 2.4 Under Regulation 19(4) of the Diving Regulations, a medical examiner of divers is defined as a person who is a registered medical practitioner approved by the Health and Safety Authority to issue a certificate of medical fitness to dive. Registered medical practitioner is further defined in Section 2(1) of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 (No. 10 of 2005) – the 2005 Act, as “a person whose name is entered in the General Register of Medical Practitioners” of the Medical Council of Ireland.
- 2.5 A list of these approved medical examiners of divers (otherwise known as AMEDs), who are available to provide medical examinations, is available on the diving section of the Health and Safety Authority’s website at www.hsa.ie or by contacting the Workplace Contact Unit at 1890 289 389 or wcu@hsa.ie. AMEDs that are not publically available are not listed. For example, medical examiners of Defence Forces divers are not listed.
- 2.6 Under the Diving Regulations, the diving contractor must ensure that there are a sufficient number of competent persons available to carry out the diving project safely and without risk to the health or welfare of such persons. The diving contractor must also ensure that any person taking part in the diving project complies with the Diving Regulations. The diving contractor must ensure that divers are fit to dive and have valid certificates of medical fitness to dive.

2.0 LEGAL REQUIREMENTS Cont'd

- 2.7 Under Regulation 5(1)(c) of the Diving Regulations, a person who is engaged in a diving project must take such measures as is reasonable for a person in their position to ensure that the Diving Regulations and any relevant code of practice are complied with. To assist the diving contractor with their legal obligations, the diver should provide the diving contractor with their certificate of medical fitness to dive.
- 2.8 Under Regulation 14(5) of the Diving Regulations, a diving supervisor must not permit any diver to take part in a diving operation if, in the opinion of the diving supervisor, the diver is not fit and competent to dive. As part of ensuring the diver's fitness, the diving supervisor must be satisfied that the diver has a valid certificate of medical fitness. Note: the certificate of medical fitness to dive does not mean that the diver is actually fit on the day of the dive, and diving supervisors will need to satisfy themselves that the diver is fit on the day of the dive.
- 2.9 It is a legal requirement under Regulation 17(4) of the Diving Regulations that a diver must not take part in a diving project if unfit to do so and should immediately inform the diving supervisor should they become unfit to dive during a diving project. If the diver knows of anything, including any illness or medical condition, which makes them unfit to dive they must make this known.
- 2.10 The Diving Regulations are made and enforced under the 2005 Act. Failure to have a valid certificate of medical fitness to dive (see paragraph 2.3) whilst partaking in a diving project, or forging or using a document with the intent to deceive are offences.
- 2.11 Under Section 64 of the 2005 Act, as it relates to powers of inspectors, an inspector of the Health and Safety Authority can require an employer, employee, owner or person in charge of the place to produce records that they may reasonably require. An inspector can ask for a diver's certificate of medical fitness to be produced and can inspect and take copies of the certificate.
- 2.12 An inspector of the Health and Safety Authority can take enforcement action including prosecution of a diver. Enforcement may involve issuing a Prohibition Notice on a diver preventing them from diving until they are in possession of a valid certificate of medical fitness to dive. Breach of a Prohibition Notice is an offence under the 2005 Act.
- 2.13 Most offences, including any breaches of Regulations under the 2005 Act are tried in the District Court, where the maximum penalty is €5000 and/or up to 12 months imprisonment, or on indictment in the Circuit Court where the maximum penalty is €3,000,000 and/or imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years.

3.0 PROCEDURE FOR APPLYING FOR A MEDICAL

- 3.1 All trainee divers must have a medical examination and hold a certificate of medical fitness to dive before they commence diver training for work purposes. Thereafter divers at work must have an annual medical examination, unless the medical examiner of divers is of the opinion that a shorter period is required.
- 3.2 Prior to learning to dive for work purposes, the trainee diver should fill out the medical questionnaire in Appendix 1. The trainee diver's general practitioner (GP) should then countersign the questionnaire. This questionnaire will assist both the trainee diver and the medical examiners of divers in determining whether there is anything in the diver's medical history that may preclude them from diving for work purposes.
- 3.3 Divers who wish to be medically examined should contact the AMED of their choice (see www.hsa.ie) stating their availability, previous medical examinations and so on. The AMED will arrange a suitable date and time for the examination.
- 3.4 When attending for the annual examination, the diver should bring their current diver's personal logbook with them for inspection. Divers should be aware of the expiry dates on their certificates, so that they can plan for subsequent examinations.
- 3.5 If an AMED decides you are unfit to dive or fit to dive with restrictions, they should explain the reasons for their decision. The AMED may consult with a medical specialist or require you to get a medical opinion from a specialist before deciding on your fitness to dive.
- 3.6 Any illness or injury may affect your fitness to work. Certain conditions (for example, any lung, heart, brain, nervous system, ear, nose or throat disorder, including decompression illness, or any illness or injury requiring you to be off work for more than 14 days), may require that you are re-examined by an AMED to assess your fitness to return to work. This re-examination involves a specific assessment of the possible effects of your illness or injury on diving safety and your ability to work as a diver. It does not replace the annual medical examination. You should contact an AMED after a period of illness or injury to consider if re-examination is required.
- 3.7 Lost certificates of medical fitness will require re-issue by the issuing AMED.

4.0 CRITERIA FOR CONDUCTING MEDICALS

- 4.1 The medical examination and assessment look at the diver's overall fitness to dive. These include the main systems of the body – cardiovascular system, respiratory system and central nervous system – as well as the ears, nose and throat, vision, dentition and the person's capacity for exercise.
- 4.2 AMEDs will examine divers using the medical form as detailed in the Doctor's guidance *The Medical Examination and Assessment of Divers at Work*. Based on information obtained from courses, journal articles or other sources, they may need to vary the criteria according to their clinical judgement.
- 4.3 If the examiner is satisfied that the diver is fit to dive, the diver will be issued with a certificate of medical fitness to dive.

5.0 FREQUENCY OF MEDICAL ASSESSMENTS, CONDITIONS AND LIMITATIONS

- 5.1 Under Regulation 19(2) of the Diving Regulations, a certificate must state the period, not exceeding a period of 12 months duration, that the medical examiner of divers considers the person will remain fit to dive.
- 5.2 The AMED may issue a certificate subject to conditions or limitations. They may place restrictions on the nature or method of diving, the depth, time, environment or duration of certification. For example, they may limit the person to diving to a depth of 30 metres or may only issue the certificate for a period of six months.
- 5.3 Where the AMED has stipulated a shorter period in the certificate, the diver must not dive utilising this certificate after that period, as they will no longer comply with Regulation 17(1) of the Diving Regulations in that the diver will no longer have a valid certificate of medical fitness to dive. The diver must re submit himself or herself for examination within the stated period and a new certificate must be issued by an AMED indicating that the diver is fit to dive.
- 5.4 Where the AMED has attached conditions to the diver's certificate, in line with Regulation 19(3) of the Diving Regulations the diver must not take part in a diving operation unless these conditions are satisfied.

APPENDIX 1 MEDICAL QUESTIONNAIRE

FOR COMPLETION BY THE CANDIDATE DIVER AND THEIR GP TO CONFIRM MEDICAL HISTORY (NO EXAMINATION IS REQUIRED).

| Question | YES | NO |
|---|-----|----|
| (Females only) Are you pregnant or likely to be pregnant? | | |
| Are you taking any prescribed or other medication? | | |
| Do you have any allergies? | | |
| Have you ever had or been treated for decompression illness? | | |
| Have you ever had or do you now have: | YES | NO |
| Cancer? | | |
| Mental health problems (including panic attacks, claustrophobia)? | | |
| Drug and/or alcohol misuse in the past three years? | | |
| Lung disease (for example, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, asthma)? | | |
| Collapsed lung (pneumothorax)? | | |
| Injury or surgery to the chest, lungs or heart? | | |
| Disease of the heart and circulation (for example, high blood pressure, angina, heart attack, chest pains, palpitations)? | | |
| Disease of the brain or nervous system (for example, epilepsy, stroke, multiple sclerosis, nerve damage)? | | |
| Blackouts, recurrent fainting, collapsing or dizziness? | | |
| Motion sickness? | | |
| Migraine? | | |
| Head injury with loss of consciousness or surgery to the head? | | |
| Bone or joint problems or surgery (for example, sciatica, spinal surgery)? | | |
| Ear, nose, throat or sinus problems? | | |

| Have you ever had or do you now have: | | YES | NO |
|---|--|----------------------|----|
| Eye problems (for example, loss of vision, double vision)? | | | |
| Diabetes or other hormone problems? | | | |
| Urinary or kidney problems or (males only) prostate problems? | | | |
| Stomach or intestinal problems or surgery (including stomas)? | | | |
| Skin disease? | | | |
| Blood or bleeding disorders? | | | |
| If the candidate diver or GP has any comments on the medical history, please use another sheet. | | | |
| Candidate diver - I certify that the above answers are correct: | | | |
| Full name | | Date of Birth | |
| Address | | | |
| Signature | | Date | |
| GP - I confirm the medical history: | | | |
| Practice Stamp | | | |
| Signature | | Date | |

Further Information and Guidance:

Visit our website at www.hsa.ie, telephone our contact centre on **1890 289 389** or email wcu@hsa.ie

Use BeSMART, our free online risk assessment tool at www.besmart.ie

Check out our range of free online courses at www.hslearning.ie



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