# IGPNEA GUIDELINES ON USE OF COMPUTER EQUIPMENT

(Reviewed Oct 23)


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**Purpose of the Policy**
The purpose of this policy is to define the way in which computer usage and electronic communications are managed in the Irish General Practice Nurses Educational Association and the rights and responsibilities of employees and members.

**Scope of the Policy**
- The aspects of this policy which pertain to the appropriate use of computer equipment apply to any computer equipment, software or hardware that has been purchased or leased by the Irish General Practice Nurses Educational Association, whether this equipment is used by employees or members.
- The Health & Safety guidelines described in this policy shall be followed by all employees. The IGPNEA recommend that members also adhere to these guidelines when using computer equipment in the course of their work for the IGPNEA.
- The aspects of this policy which refer to the legal obligations of the IGPNEA as an employer, apply to IPNA employees only.

**Terms**
The term “User” will be employed to cover all such persons (above).
The term “Computer” applies to all computers, laptops or software that have been purchased or leased by the IPNA. The purchase of all such equipment is subject to the authorisation of the NEC Officers.

**Computer Usage**
In making acceptable use of the IGPNEA’s computer resources, users must;
- Use resources only for relevant purposes.
- Protect one’s user ID and system from unauthorised users.
- Access only information that is one’s own, that is publicly available, or to which the user has been given authorised access.

**Access**
All PC access will be through passwords which will be shared only within IGPNEA.
Care must be taken to secure the portable computers from theft. They should be stored in a car boot or kept with the user while travelling. They must be properly insured.
Data must be backed up and stored separately from the computer.

**Internet Usage**
Care must be taken in the use of information accessed through the Internet. Most information is unregulated, and as such there is no guarantee of accuracy.
Employees and members should take every reasonable precaution not to download files from the Internet unless they are sure the information is from a trusted/reliable source.

Access to appropriate websites for relevant purposes is generally unrestricted. Access to any inappropriate, pornographic or obscene websites, or sites with the risk of such material, is prohibited at all times.

Employees and members accessing or storing any form of electronic file, record or communication, which could be deemed to harass or discriminate based on age, gender, race, religion, disability, marital status, family status, sexual orientation or membership of the travelling community is unacceptable, and will be subject to a disciplinary process.

**Virus Protection**
Reliable or industry recommended Virus Protection Software must be installed on all IPNA hardware and kept updated. Computers must also be regularly scanned for viruses, i.e. at least once a week.

However, as there is still a high risk of viruses being received from external electronic communications, in particular from unknown sources, care must be taken at all times when opening e-mails. If an employee receives an external e-mail or message from an unknown source, which they feel is wrongly delivered, the email should not be opened and the employee should delete the e-mail from both the inbox and the trash box immediately.

**E-mail and Contents**
While e-mail is a fast and efficient method of business communication, employees must not overlook the fact that it has the same legal effect as written communications. Due to the permanent nature of e-mails and the legal implications to both the IGPNEA and employees, messages should be written and formatted appropriately. The wording, tone and language should be concise and carefully prepared by employees in order to avoid ambiguity, inaccuracy, claims of defamation, breach of confidentiality and the possibility of offending anyone. In particular employees should not use email for the communication or discussion of sensitive, controversial or disputed issues, for example disciplinary issues.
The IGPNEA strictly forbids the practice of flaming, which is sending offensive or malicious e-mails, and also forbids the sending of chain mail. No form of discriminatory comment, aggression, harassment or bullying is permitted through e-mails.

**Legal Implications**
All electronic documentation is now recognised for legal purposes, similar to paper-based documentation.
Data contained in e-mails could be accessible under Data Protection or Freedom of Information legislation. All electronic information is also covered by defamatory

legislation, and inappropriate material could result in individual liability to prosecution.
All external communications with employees, members and outside bodies must be considered for the relevance of content, accuracy, and potential to commit the IGPNEA to business transactions or exposure to liability. Therefore, employees should clearly evaluate such communication before it is sent, and if in any doubt, consult with their IGPNEA colleague or NEC Officer.

**Security**
The IGPNEA needs to ensure that any information transmitted from its computer system to other systems is secure. This is essential as much of the information could be highly confidential. Employees should note that email is not a secure medium and in addition there is a risk that outgoing messages may not go to the intended recipient or could be viewed by third parties before receipt by the intended recipient*.*

**Disclaimers**
There should be a disclaimer attached to every external e-mail communication. This will provide protection to the IGPNEA in relation to organisational matters, and distinguishes personal views.

The use of personal information, such as credit card details, on the Internet is discouraged. Persons entering such details on the Internet, or transmitting them via the organisation's e-mail system, do so entirely at their own risk.

**Software/Hardware**
All computer equipment, software installations or Anti-Virus Protection Software purchased or leased by the IGPNEA remains the property of the IGPNEA. Care must be taken to ensure that the IGPNEA is fully compliant with all software licence agreements.
The display of screen savers is no different to the display of paper notices or pictures. Accordingly, any such display in the work place must not cause offence and must not interfere with work.

**Examples of Violations of this policy**

- Accessing another person's computer, computer account, files, or data without permission.
- Engaging in any activity that might be purposefully harmful to systems such as creating or propagating viruses, disrupting service, or damaging files.
- Performing any act that will interfere with the normal operation of computers, terminals, peripherals, or networks.
- Using IGPNEA systems or networks for personal gain, e.g., performing work for profit with the organisation's resources in a manner not authorised by the IGPNEA.

- Accessing, creating, displaying, printing, downloading or transmitting information which violates IGPNEA's Dignity at Work Policy. This includes, but is not limited to, displaying sexually explicit, graphically disturbing, offensive or sexually harassing images or text.
- Engaging in any other activity that does not comply with the general principles presented above.

This is not an exhaustive list of violations of the policy. Any other acts that are perceived by the IGPNEA as violations will be subject to disciplinary procedures.

# HEALTH & SAFETY ISSUES SURROUNDING COMPUTER USAGE

***As all IGPNEA employees currently work from home, it is the responsibility of each employee to ensure that this policy is applied to their working practices. Each employee should perform a risk assessment of their workstation. The specific requirements of each individual to ensure that their workstation is ergonomically suitable should be discussed with the NEC Officers with a view to finding appropriate solutions.***

**Display Screen Equipment Regulations 1993**
The following should be considered when deciding if the Display Screen Equipment Regulations are applicable to an employee:

- if the employee has no choice but to use the VDU to carry out her/his work
- if the employee normally uses the VDU for continuous periods of more than one hour
- if the VDU is generally used by the employee on a daily basis

**Employer's duties in providing health and safety protection for employees who habitually use display screen equipment**
Although it is the responsibility of the employer in an office situation to perform an analysis of the workstations in order to evaluate the safety and health of employees, (with particular reference to eyesight, physical difficulties and mental stress), the employees of the IGPNEA who work from home should carry this out themselves. Steps must be taken to remedy any risks or potential risks to health & safety that are identified.
The following is a guideline tool for risk assessment of all workstations. If necessary, someone with the necessary expertise may carry this out. The application of the Regulations needs to take account of the suitability of the measures to the task at hand.
The IGPNEA shall:

- Consult with employees on all issues pertaining to Health & Safety and use of computer equipment.
- Identify the employees to whom the VDU regulations apply and the workstations used.
- Provide a suitable environment and equipment for VDU work.
- Provide eye tests if they are requested and glasses if needed for VDU work.
- Inform employees of the hazards associated with VDUs and of what can be done to protect employees.

**Definition of "workstation"**
The definition of "workstation" is all encompassing and includes the VDU, along with all the individual pieces of accessories and equipment, e.g., keyboard or other input device, chair, desk and the immediate work environment.

**WRULDs**

WRULDs are Work Related Upper Limb Disorders, which refer to a range of adverse effects on the arm, hand and shoulder areas linked to work activities. These disorders may range from temporary fatigue or soreness in the limbs, to cramp, to ongoing pain in the muscles or nerves. These effects are generally due to a number of factors rather than any single cause. Holding a part of the body rigid for a long time (e.g., the back, neck and head) may cause discomfort in the muscles, bones and tendons. Likewise, awkward positioning of the hands and wrist relative to the work being carried out is another likely factor.

These effects can be avoided by correct use of proper equipment, suitable furniture and thorough training. Problems can be avoided by good workplace design and by good working practices. Prevention is easiest if action is taken early through effective analysis of each workstation.

**Other complaints arising from working with VDUs**

Other physical effects include:

Effects on the eyes:

Employees may experience temporary eye fatigue, with such symptoms as failure to see clearly, red or sore eyes and headaches. Eye fatigue may also lead to employees adopting awkward postures which may cause discomfort of the limbs. Medical evidence shows that using VDUs does not cause damage to eyes or eyesight, nor does it make existing defects worse. However, eye fatigue may be caused by:

- staying in the same position and concentrating for a long time.
- poor positioning of the VDU.
- poor legibility of the screen or source documents.
- poor lighting, including glare and reflections.
- a drifting, flickering or jittering image on the screen.

Fatigue and Stress:

Some tasks may require a very high degree of concentration and vigilance, and can result in stress or fatigue. Several symptoms, including fatigue, described by VDU users can also be caused by stress arising from broader aspects of their work. They are more likely to be caused by poor organisation of the work, lack of control by the employee over the pace of the work, underutilisation of skills, high-speed repetitive work or working in isolation.

- The onset of fatigue and stress can be minimised by careful design, selection and location of VDUs, good design of the workstation, its environment and the task involved as well as training, consultation and involvement of the employee

**VDU work in IGPNEA**

The volume of VDU work to be carried out by IGPNEA employees and members can vary widely between different employments and activities. VDU-related work may include:

a) updating computerised Membership Records from written forms.
b) Maintaining accounts.
c) Documentation creation and revision.

**If an employee has a complaint arising from use of VDUs**
The employee should approach the NEC Officers initially and express any concerns. The IGPNEA as an employer is obliged to carry out a risk assessment as outlined in the regulations. The employee should look at the risks associated with the workstation, which may be presenting a risk to health and safety. Ask the following questions:

- Is the display screen image clear?
- Are the screen characters easy to read?
- Is the keyboard comfortable?
- Does the furniture 'fit' the work and the user?
- Is the environment around the workstations risk free?
- Is the software user friendly?

If you answer 'no' to any of the above then it is likely that the workstation does not comply with the VDU Regulations.

**Ergonomics**
Ergonomics is the science of fitting the task to the person. It focuses on the person and their interaction with the workstation and the environment used in everyday life and work. Every workstation has to be assessed to fit the person.

**Minimum requirements for work with display screens.**
The minimum requirements for all display screens include:

- the characters on the screen must be well defined and clearly formed, be of adequate size and with adequate spacing between the characters and lines
- the image on the screen must be stable, with no flickering or other forms of instability
- the VDU shall be capable of adjustment for contrast and brightness by the employee. This will help avoid eyestrain.
- the VDU shall be free of reflective glare and reflections liable to cause discomfort. Work surroundings should have a low reflective finish.
- it must be possible to adjust the screen to suit the height and position of the employee as necessary. As a general guide, the eyes should be the same height as the top of the VDU.

**Minimum requirements for work with keyboards.**
The minimum requirements regarding keyboards include:

- the keyboard should be designed so that the employee can work efficiently in reasonable comfort
- the keyboard shall be positioned so as to allow sufficient space for the employee's hands and arms to be supported

- the keyboard should be detachable so that the employee can find a suitable working position and avoid straining hands and arms, i.e., it should be positioned so that the angle of the employee's elbow (when seated) between the forearm and the upper arm is in the range of 70º to 90º
- the employee should be able to look at parts of the keyboard used frequently without lowering the head
- the keys should have low reflectance surfaces and should have concave tops to follow the contours of the finger tips
- the symbols on the keys should be adequately contrasted and legible from the design working position
- the keyboard shall be tiltable and separate from the screen so as to allow the user to find a comfortable working position which avoids fatigue in the arms and/or hands

**Standards that cover the design of workstations.**
I.S EN ISO 9241:1999 is the standard concerned with ergonomic requirements for office work with visual display terminals.
This standard covers the following aspects concerned with display screen equipment and workstations:

- Part 1: General introduction
- Part 2: Guidance on task requirements
- Part 3: Visual display requirements
- Part 4: Keyboard requirements
- Part 5: Workstation layout and postural requirements
- Part 6: Guidance on the work environment
- Part 7: Requirements for display with reflections
- Part 8: Requirements for displayed colours
- Part 9: Requirements for non-keyboard input devices
- Part 10: Dialogue principles
- Part 11: Guidance on usability
- Part 12: Presentation of information
- Part 13: User guidance
- Part 14: Menu dialogue
- Part 15: Command dialogues
- Part 16: Direct-manipulation dialogues
- Part 17: Form filling dialogues

The National Standards Authority of Ireland can be contacted via their website on www.nsai.ie

**Minimum requirements for work desks or work surfaces**
The minimum requirements regarding work desks or work surfaces include:

- the work desk must have a matt or low reflectance surface
- the work desk must permit a flexible arrangement of the screen, keyboard and document holder.

- the area underneath should be clear of any materials in order to allow adequate knee clearance. There are standards available, which will give recommended specifications for office desks, which will allow for adequate knee and thigh clearance as well as other important design considerations.
- storage space for documents, etc. should be provided in the desk without interfering with comfortable use of the screen.
- the document holder shall be stable and adjustable and shall be positioned so as to allow the employee read the document without awkward extension or bending of the neck.
- there must be adequate space available for users to find a comfortable position.

**Minimum requirements for work chair**
The minimum requirements regarding work chairs include:

- the work chair must be stable and allow the user easy freedom of movement and a comfortable position
- the seat must be adjustable in height
- the seat back must be adjustable in both height and tilt
- a footrest shall be made available to any user who requires one
- the support area produced by back rests for the employee's lower back should be as large as possible so as to avoid undue pressure on the employee's thighs and spine.

**Minimum requirements as regards workspace at a workstation**
There must be sufficient space for the employee to carry out their work safely and comfortably. Each workstation should allow the employee the room to stretch out arms or legs and to turn from side to side, adequate freedom of movement and the ability to stand upright and move unhindered to any way out.

**Requirements as regards lighting at a workstation**
Detailed guidance on lighting can be found in the CIBSE (Chartered Institute of Building Services Engineers) Lighting Guide LG3 "The visual environment for display screen use" and in Part 6 of I.S. EN ISO 9241.
Correct lighting arrangements are essential if eye fatigue is to be avoided –

- reflections and glare can cause discomfort for the employee by making it difficult to see the information on the VDU.
- VDUs should not be positioned directly under overhead lights
- windows shall be fitted with suitable blinds etc. that can be adjusted to reduce light and glare

**Level of lighting that should be used when working at display screens**
As a general rule a level of lighting of 300 – 500 lux should be appropriate. If more light is required for reading documents, local lighting should be used.

**Noise levels should be kept to a minimum**
Noise can be reduced in the office environment:

- by the repositioning of printers and office equipment
- by the use of sound absorbent partitions and suitable floor coverings
- where printers are installed near the employee, suitable housings designed to reduce noise should be provided

**Ventilation**
Work areas should be well ventilated, kept at a comfortable temperature and humidity and free of draughts so as to avoid fatigue and discomfort.

**What is comfortable relative humidity and how can it be achieved?**
Hot dry air will cause the eye surface to dry, creating eye irritation, which *may* lead to fatigue. Indoor relative humidity levels between 40-60% are usually considered comfortable. Tests *may* be carried out using a wet and dry thermometer or other measuring equipment. This is particularly important where work is carried out in a relatively confined space or where there are several VDU workstations.

**Recommended breaks to be taken when working at a VDU**
***Employees must plan work so that daily work at VDUs is interrupted periodically by breaks or changes in activity which reduce the work at the screen***. The Regulations do not specify the frequency or duration of work breaks when working with VDUs. Ideally, the length of the rest should reflect the intensity of the individual job. However, ***no single continuous period of work at a screen should, in general, exceed one hour*****.** However, there are four important points:

- Rest breaks or changes in the pattern of work, where they are necessary, should be taken before fatigue sets in. Some employees suffer symptoms from the effort used to keep up performance while fatigued
- The employee should not sit in the same position for long periods. Make sure to change posture as often as practicable, but avoid repeated stretching to reach things you need. If this happens a lot, rearrange the workstation
- Short frequent rest breaks are more satisfactory than longer breaks taken occasionally
- Rest breaks should be taken away from the VDU. Other duties may be assigned during this period, provided they are not too intensive.

**Eye and eyesight test**
Every employee who habitually uses a VDU (i.e., for one continuous hour or more as part of everyday work) as a significant part of normal work has a right to opt for an appropriate eye test and an eyesight test which must be made available and paid for by the employer, except where there may be a social welfare entitlement.

**Recommended frequency of eyesight tests**
Employees have the right to an eye and eyesight test before taking up work if it is

habitual work with a VDU as well as at regular intervals thereafter. In determining the intervals, factors such as the ages of the employees and the intensity of VDU work should be taken into account in deciding the frequency of repeat tests. Additionally, an appropriate eye and eyesight test must be made available to an employee who experiences visual difficulties which may be due to display screen work.

**Employer's liability for the costs of providing glasses**

When eye tests carried out by the doctor or optometrist reveal that particular lenses are required for VDU work, the basic costs of providing the glasses, or of new lenses where the employee already wears glasses, must be borne by the employer, taking account of any social welfare entitlement that might apply. However, where an employee already wears glasses to correct a visual defect (normal corrective appliances), and a routine change of lenses arises, if these glasses are adequate also for VDU work, the employer is not liable as regards meeting the cost.

**VDUs and epilepsy**

There are no evidence to suggest that VDU's can actually cause epilepsy. However, seizures may be provoked in a few people who already have sensitivity to the flicker and glare effect of the screen, especially as the nature of use means the person is close to the screen. Only a very small number of people are affected in this way (as few as 3-5% of all people with epilepsy), which means that computer work should not be an unduly restricted occupation for people with epilepsy.

Many people who are photosensitive may still use computers quite safely. The high flicker rate of most current computer displays (CRTs or Cathode Ray Tubes) means they present a very small risk to people with photosensitive epilepsy. When using VDUs, such workers should adhere to safety advice, e.g., using a screen filter to reduce glare, adjusting the rate of flicker, using an LCD screen, reduce the brightness of the screen, taking frequent breaks and avoiding becoming overtired. However, those with photosensitive epilepsy may find that more problems arise using older rather than newer equipment due to the speed of flicker.

Liquid Crystal Display screens (LCDs) and Thin Film Transistor screens (TFTs) are flicker free and may pose less risk to a person with photosensitive epilepsy. Glare factors may still need to be accommodated with an attachable anti-glare screen if this measure is not built in. For further information on epilepsy and photosensitive epilepsy, contact the Irish Epilepsy Association at www.epilepsy.ie

Policy drafted July 2007.

Consultation with employees and members:

Date enacted: Formally ratified by vote at AGM 10th November 2007.

Date of review:

Signed: _____

Position in IGPNEA: _____

References:

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| Health Services Executive | www.hse.ie |
| Health & Safety Authority | www.hsa.ie |