

**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 2022.**

Annual Report

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MAIN MESSAGES

- This is the latest annual report, summarising the results from The Health and Occupation Research network in the Republic of Ireland (THOR-ROI) based on data collected during 2022.
- THOR-ROI comprises of 4 surveillance schemes collecting data on incident cases of work-related illness (WRI) in the Republic of Ireland; SWORD-ROI (chest physicians), EPIDERM-ROI (dermatologists), OPRA-ROI (occupational physicians) and THOR-GP-ROI (general practitioners).
- The COVID-19 pandemic crisis and the interruptions it caused made 2020 and 2021 challenging years. Although case numbers remain below normal, there appears to have been a slight improvement in general practitioner reporting from 2021.
- In 2022, 27 occupational physicians, 12 dermatologists 9 chest physicians and 20 general practitioners participated in THOR-ROI.
- A total of 57 cases were reported in 2022 (occupational physicians: 16, dermatologists: 19, chest physicians: 18, and general practitioners: 4). In total, the number of reported incident cases between 2005 and 2022 is 2958 (occupational physicians: 2040, dermatologists: 576, chest physicians: 298, general practitioners: 44).
- Dermatologists reported (2005-2022) predominantly contact dermatitis cases (98%), with majority of all reported cases reports being female (57% of contact dermatitis cases) and a mean age (all contact dermatitis cases) of 38 years. Frequently reported industries/occupations were manufacturing (process operatives), healthcare (nurses), and personal service occupations (hairdressers and beauty therapist). Most frequently reported agents were rubber, wet work, preservatives, and nickel.
- Asthma was the largest category of cases reported by chest physician (2005-2022) (32%). The majority of all reported cases reports was male (83%), and the mean age (all cases) was 57 years. Frequently reported industries/occupations were construction (labourers) and manufacturing, with isocyanates, ill-defined fumes/gases and cement/plaster/masonry dust being the most frequently reported agents.
- Occupational physician case reports (2007-2022) were predominantly mental ill-health (53%) and musculoskeletal (33%) with smaller proportions of skin (8%), respiratory (2%) and 'other' WRIH (4%). The majority (77%) of cases were reported in health and social care (mainly nurses and nurse auxiliaries), mostly in females (67%) with mean age (all cases) of 43 years. A significant proportion were also reported in transport (bus drivers) (11%).
- The 20 general practitioners participating in THOR-GP-ROI have reported 44 cases since the scheme commenced data collection in 2015; musculoskeletal cases were reported most frequently (18 cases). Most cases were reported in females (62%) with mean age of 42 years.
- A total of 35 case reports attributed to SARS-CoV-2 virus have been reported by occupational physicians and general practitioners to THOR-ROI between 2020 and 2022, with majority of the cases having a diagnosis of long-covid (48%), followed by post-covid (34%) or active covid-19 infection (17%). All cases worked in the health and social care industrial sector, with nurses (46%) and nurse auxiliaries (21%) being the most frequently reported occupations.

SUMMARY OF CASES REPORTED TO THOR-ROI

Disease group	Reporting physicians	Number of cases		
		2022 (n)	2005 ^a -2022 (n)	(%)
Skin	Dermatologists	19	576	19%
	Occupational physicians	2	176	6%
	General practitioners	1	6	<1%
Respiratory	Chest physicians	18	298	10%
	Occupational physicians	4	52	2%
	General practitioners	0	1	<1%
Musculoskeletal	Occupational physicians	4	683	23%
	General practitioners	1	18	<1%
Mental ill-health	Occupational physicians	6	1045	35%
	General practitioners	2	12	<1%
Other	Occupational physicians	1	84	3%
	General practitioners	0	7	<1%
Total cases ^{b, c}	All physicians	57	2958	

ⁿ Number of cases; % Proportion of cases from the total number of cases reported to all 4 schemes between 2005 and 2022.

^a 2007 for occupational physicians; 2015 for general practitioners

^b a case may have been assigned to more than 1 disease group (for example, musculoskeletal and mental ill-health)

^c Totals may have increased from previous reporting due to the submission of late cases.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND: Chest physicians, dermatologists, occupational physicians and general practitioners 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 (2022) and provides a summary of results based on all case reports since the commencement of the different schemes (2005 for dermatologists and chest physicians; 2007 for occupational physicians; 2015 for general practitioners).

METHODS: Physicians have been and are continuously recruited to THOR-ROI with assistance from the scheme's champions and relevant societies within the ROI. Participating physicians are asked to provide anonymised information 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 were estimated for selected reporter groups/diagnoses.

RESULTS: The 68 physicians enrolled in THOR-ROI in 2022 (27 occupational physicians, 12 dermatologists, 9 chest physicians and 20 general practitioners) reported 57 cases (59 diagnoses). In comparison, 109 (121 diagnoses), 93 (103 diagnoses) and 100 (116 diagnoses) cases were reported in 2019, 2020 and 2021, respectively. Of the 57 cases reported to THOR-ROI in 2022, 16 cases were reported by occupational physicians, 18 were reported by chest physicians, 19 were reported by dermatologists and 4 cases were reported by general practitioners. General practitioners reported no cases to THOR-GP ROI in the previous year. This brings the total number of cases reported between 2005 and 2022 to 2958 (occupational physicians: 2040, dermatologists: 576, chest physicians: 298, general practitioners: 44 case reports).

CONCLUSION: Since the inception of the reporting schemes nearly 3,000 cases of WRI have been reported to THOR-ROI. There have been fluctuations in reporter activity since the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, with overall number of reported cases somewhat lower in 2022 compared to previous years. It is

clearly important to promote the THOR-ROI scheme and increase recruitment of physicians in ROI to increase the reporting levels.

Despite the changes in the reporting numbers, the distribution of reported cases of WRI by diagnosis has remained relatively stable, although since the start of the pandemic 35 cases related to COVID-19 have been reported.