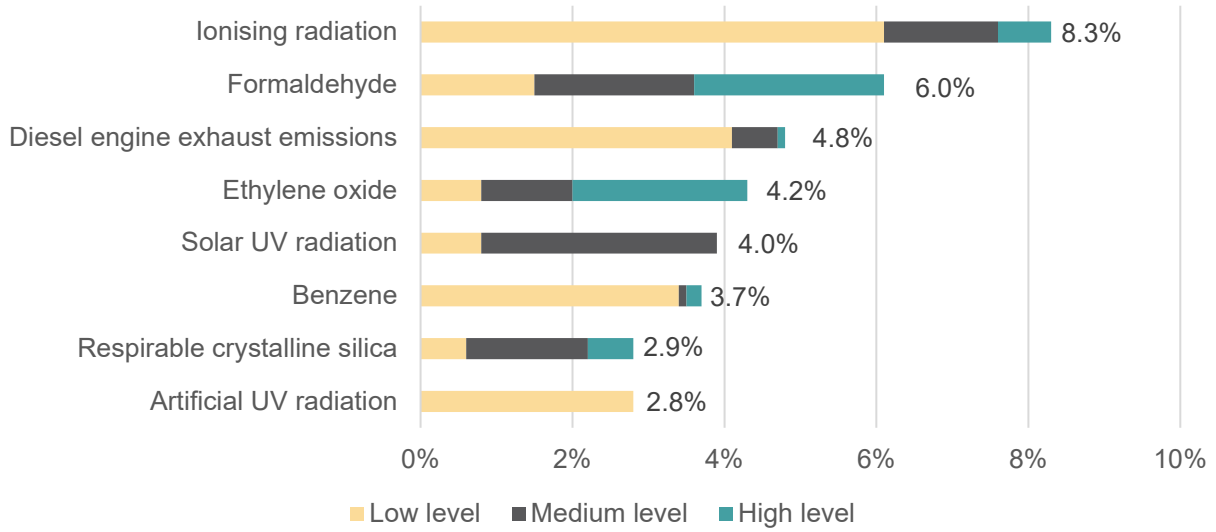
Occupational cancer risk factors in Europe
Healthcare and social care workers

Interviews with workers: Germany, Ireland, Spain, France, Hungary and Finland (24,402 interviews)
Fieldwork dates: September 2022 – February 2023 | **Methodology:** telephone | **Exposure assessment:** www.occideas.org

Interviews in the healthcare sector: 2,478 – representing 6.9 million workers

Main exposures to cancer risk factors in the last working week – healthcare workers

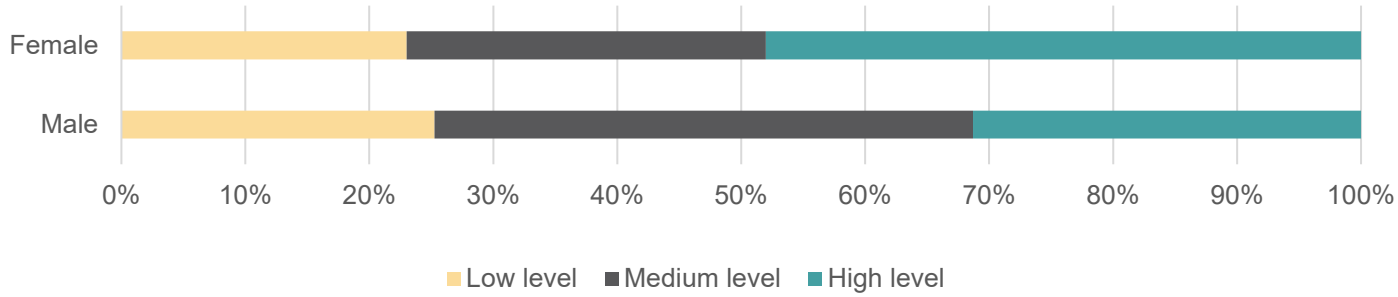
Figure 1: Proportion of probably exposed workers in the healthcare sector, by exposure level (%)



Source: WES 2023, EU-OSHA | reference population: healthcare workers.

Figure 1 shows that exposure to ionising radiation is the most common exposure at a low level, while exposure to formaldehyde at a medium and high level has the highest prevalence.

Figure 2: Healthcare workers probably exposed to formaldehyde, by exposure level and gender



Source: WES 2023, EU-OSHA | reference population: healthcare workers exposed to formaldehyde.

Figure 2 shows that probable exposure at a high level affects more often female workers exposed to formaldehyde in the healthcare sector, compared to male workers (48% versus 31%).

Interviews in the healthcare and social care sector: 3,041 – representing 12.7 million workers

Exposure to formaldehyde in the last working week – healthcare and social care workers (HeSCare)

The Workers' exposure survey shows that:

- **5.2% of workers in the HeSCare sector were probably exposed to formaldehyde** during the previous working week.
- Common exposure circumstances include **working in gross anatomy labs** (38%), **using formaldehyde or formalin for sterilisation** (37%), including at a high level for 4 out of 5 workers exposed in sterilisation tasks.
- Estimated **exposure at a high level was likely related to poor ventilation or little reported use of respiratory protective equipment**.
- **General ventilation system was reported** by 65% of the exposed workers working in the circumstances, when asked (Table 1).
- Local exhaust ventilation or on-tool extraction were less reported, except in pathology labs (63% of the workers exposed to formaldehyde reported using a laboratory fume hood, a fume cupboard, or a multiple slot hood).
- **14 to 27% of the workers exposed reported none of the protection measures listed** (Table 1).

Table 1: Circumstances of exposure to formaldehyde in the HeSCare sector, and protection measures reported

Exposure circumstances	Probable exposure at any level	Workers reporting the use of ventilation		Workers reporting the use of respiratory protective equipment (RPE)			Workers reporting none of the protection measures
	Share of probably exposed workers	Local exhaust ventilation or on-tool extraction	General ventilation system	Rubber face mask fitted with filter/ cartridge	Powered air-purifying respirator (PAPR)	Air-supplied respirator or self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA)	None of the protection measures asked
Working in a gross anatomy lab*	**38%**	34%	65%	3%	8%	2%	14%
Using formaldehyde or formalin for sterilisation	**37%**	20%	65%	3%	13%	0%	19%
Handling formaldehyde, specimens preserved in formaldehyde solution (formalin) or waste containing formaldehyde in a pathology lab**	**29%**	63%	(not asked)	6%	5%	18%	27%

Source: WES 2023, EU-OSHA | reference population: HeSCare workers exposed to formaldehyde.
** Examples of working in a gross anatomy lab include doing dissections, washing biological tissues, filling containers with formalin in open workspaces and carrying out autopsies.*
*** A pathology lab is where tissues, organs, bodily fluids are examined, and autopsies conducted in order to study and diagnose disease.*
Note: the same worker could work in one or more of the circumstances listed in the last working week; the same worker could report different protection measures for one circumstance.

For more info, please consult the full report, its summary and EU-OSHA web section dedicated to the survey.