Back injuries are among the most common workplace injuries and the most common musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs). Although they may not be as dramatic as fatal accidents or amputation incidents, MSDs can be extremely painful for employees, as well as costly for employers. According to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](https://www.bls.gov/iif/oshwc/osh/case/msd_cd_r2_00_2018.xlsx) (BLS), in 2018, local governments experienced 45.4 percent of work-related musculoskeletal disorders.

* **Back injuries** in the BLS local government sector ranked as the second most common work-related MSD, accounting for 15.6 percent in 2018. To help prevent back injuries, workers should always follow [safe lifting practices](https://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/dosh_publications/liftingSafer.pdf). Workplace wellness programs that encourage physical fitness and healthy body weight may also help to reduce back injuries.
* **Shoulder injuries** accounted for just 5.6 percent of MSDs in 2018 but tended to be the most severe, requiring a median of 30 days away from work to recover. Light stretching, the use of lifting and gripping aids, and frequent short rest breaks can help to minimize the risk of shoulder injuries.

**Rx for Preventing Back Injuries**

According to the staff at the [Mayo Clinic](https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/back-pain/art-20044526), there are prevention steps your employees can take to avoid injuring their backs:

* **Physical activity.** Exercise helps keep the back limber and strong. The people at the Mayo Clinic remind us that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends that healthy adults get at least 150 minutes a week of moderate aerobic activity (walking or golfing, for example) or 75 minutes of more vigorous activity (jogging, basketball, tennis, or biking, for example). HHS also recommends strength training twice a week to strengthen back and abdominal muscles.
* **Posture.** Poor posture is a common cause of back pain. Slouching when standing or sitting is a major culprit. When standing for long periods, employees should stand with feet apart and weight balanced over both feet. When sitting, employees should sit up straight, with both feet flat on the floor. A pillow can be used to support the lower back.

**This model form/template must be customized to meet your Agency’s needs.**

* **Proper lifting.** The key to safe lifting and preventing back injuries is to lift with the legs, not with the back. When lifting objects, employees should bend the knees, maintain the natural curve of the back, and let the leg muscles power the lift as they rise. For objects that are too heavy to be lifted safely, employees should use mechanical aids or get help from a co-worker.
* **Repetitive tasks.** Repetition of the same movements over and over puts a lot of stress on the body. Tasks that involve bending, twisting, reaching and lifting should be modified to the extent possible to minimize strain on the back. The Mayo Clinic staff also recommends that employees alternate tasks that are physically demanding on the back with less stressful ones to give their backs a chance to rest.
* **Time out.** Frequent short breaks when performing physically demanding or repetitive tasks can also help reduce the risk of a back injury. Employees should take mini breaks of a minute or two every half hour or so to stretch and relax tired back muscles.