

Human Rights



Merck & Co., Inc. is committed to meeting its responsibility to respect internationally recognized human rights standards, as they relate to our operations. We believe that dignity and respect for people is essential in business. Respect for human rights is core to our Company's purpose to save and improve lives around the world.

Purpose

The purpose of this public policy statement is to express our Company's commitment to respect and promote internationally recognized human rights standards, and to explain our approach to identifying, preventing, and mitigating adverse human rights impacts related to our operations and our supply chain.

Approach

Our approach to human rights is guided by internationally recognized standards. Our commitment to human rights embraces established global standards such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the ILO's Declaration on the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

While governments have the primary responsibility to protect human rights, we recognize that we have a responsibility to prevent, mitigate, and address adverse impacts on human rights throughout our business operations and to influence and encourage our suppliers and other business partners to do the same.

We strive to avoid causing or contributing to adverse human rights impacts through our own activities and seek to prevent or mitigate adverse human rights impacts that are linked to our operations and products. We expect all our employees, suppliers, and other business partners to conduct their business in a manner that respects human rights.

Salient Human Rights Issues

We assess and analyze potential human rights risks related to our business and operations and we focus our attention on the following issues which we consider involve the most severe actual or potential adverse human rights impacts.

1. Labor Rights

1.1 Child labor

We reject all forms of child labor. We do not employ children below the legal minimum age of employment in any country. We apply a minimum working age of 15 years, even where local legislation permits younger children to be employed. Employees under the age of 18 only perform work in accordance with local legal requirements.

1.2 Forced labor

We prohibit all forms of forced and compulsory labor. All labor must be voluntary. We do not tolerate any form of forced labor, including bonded labor, indentured labor, military labor, modern forms of slavery and any instances of human trafficking.

1.3 Discrimination

We do not tolerate discrimination, including any verbal or physical conduct that creates a hostile or offensive work environment, such as a person's race, gender, age, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, or any other characteristic protected by law.

1.4 Harassment

We are committed to maintaining an environment free of harassment and intimidation. We do not tolerate any mental, physical, or sexual harassment, or any other infringement that violates an employee's right to dignity and respect. We do not tolerate violence, threats, threatening or malicious behavior, intimidation, or any form of workplace violence.

1.5 Freedom of association

We respect our employees' right to join or not to join a trade union or employee representation of their choice, free from threat or intimidation. We recognize and respect the right to engage in collective bargaining in accordance with applicable local laws and regulations.

1.6 Wages and benefits

We are committed to investing in the growth, success, and well-being of our employees. We provide fair, equitable and competitive pay and regularly review our compensation programs to ensure they are competitive compared to other organizations in the health care industry. In addition, we provide health and wellbeing, insurance, and retirement programs that support the needs of our employees.

1.7 Working time

We adhere to applicable laws governing working time and paid leave. We respect the right to rest and leisure, including vacation with pay, and the right to family life. We are dedicated to providing an environment where employees can integrate and balance their work and home responsibilities and take care of themselves and their family.

1.8 Diversity and inclusion

We value the diversity of our workforce and strive to provide a work environment of mutual respect, inclusion and accountability which respects the dignity of all employees – and is conducive to a high-performance culture. We are committed to a policy of equal opportunity in all aspects of employment. All employment-related decisions are based on merit, qualifications (e.g., education and experience) and other job-related criteria.

1.9 Third party labor rights

We strive to conduct business with individuals and organizations who share our commitment to high ethical standards and who operate in a socially and environmentally responsible manner. We expect all our suppliers and other business partners to uphold the human rights of their workers and to treat them with dignity and respect.

2. RIGHT TO A SAFE WORKPLACE

2.1. Health and safety

We conduct our operations with the highest regard for the safety and health of employees and the protection of the public. We all play a critical role in creating and sustaining a safe and compliant workplace. Each of us is responsible for complying with all safety rules, policies, procedures, and applicable regulations and taking the necessary precautions to protect ourselves, our colleagues, our communities, and our environment.

3. RIGHT TO PRIVACY

3.1 Privacy and data protection

We are dedicated to respecting and safeguarding the privacy of individuals who place their trust in us by providing us with their personal information, recognizing it as a fundamental human right. This includes patients and our customers, clinical trial participants, suppliers, and employees. Our commitment extends from the point where we collect or acquire personal information (only collecting which is necessary to carry out the stated purpose, and nothing more), to how we use and manage it in our operations, and to the point where we return or delete the personal data when it is no longer needed.

4. RIGHT TO A CLEAN & HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

4.1 Protecting the environment

We demonstrate respect for the environment by complying with both the intent and letter of the environmental laws and regulations in every jurisdiction in which we operate. In addition, we follow our own global environmental standards that establish minimum requirements regardless of where we operate. We consider the impact of our operations and strive to operate our business sustainably to support the health of our planet and its people.

5. RIGHT TO HEALTH

5.1 Product quality

We are committed to fulfilling all regulatory obligations pertaining to the research, development, manufacturing, packaging, testing, supply, marketing, use, and monitoring of our products. To achieve this, we maintain robust Quality Management Systems and cultivate a culture that prioritizes the delivery of high quality, safe and effective products.

5.2 Research integrity

Research integrity is foundational to our scientific discoveries. We aspire to develop innovative products that save and improve lives around the world. In all our operations, we are committed to meeting or exceeding industry standards, such as Good Clinical Practices, Good Laboratory Practices, and Good Manufacturing Practices. We conduct basic research with scientific integrity to ensure objectivity, reproducibility, and clarity.

5.3 Access to health

We recognize that, in collaboration with key stakeholders, we have a role to play in helping to ensure our science advances health care, and our products are accessible and affordable to those in need. Our statement of Guiding Principles for Access to Health guides our global approach.

5.4 Clinical trials

We conduct clinical trials with the utmost regard for the integrity of the clinical data as well as the health and safety of participants while furthering the interests of science and society. We are committed to ensuring compliance with all applicable regulatory requirements in the countries where our clinical trials are conducted. We advocate for diversity in clinical trials and adhere to relevant guidance on Good Clinical Practices, as well as to the ethical principles that have their origin in the Declaration of Helsinki.

5.5 Marketing and promotion

We are committed to promoting and communicating about our products and services for human and animal health in a manner that is consistent with our values, all applicable laws and regulations and relevant industry standards that apply to our conduct. Communications about our products must be useful, accurate and supported by scientific evidence, and presented in a way that is honest and fair, consistent with approved product labelling, and aligned with appropriate use. We adhere to our Company's Promotional Communications Requirements for Drug Products.

5.6 Counterfeit or illicit products

The presence of counterfeit, diverted, tampered, or stolen medical products poses a significant global public health risk. We maintain a comprehensive Product Integrity program that is focused on securing the legitimate supply chain, investigating, and supporting enforcement actions against bad actors, and promoting advocacy and awareness measures that protect our patients from the negative impacts of counterfeit and illicit medical products.

Delivering on Our Commitment

- **Policy framework** - We embed our commitment to respect human rights in our Company's [Code of Conduct](#), our [Business Partner Code of Conduct](#), as well as relevant corporate level policies and procedures. Moreover, our commitment to respecting human rights is integrated into our strategic framework, which encompasses our key priorities, our guiding principles, our core values, and our annual enterprise initiatives.
- **Governance** - We have established internal bodies to ensure effective governance of our salient human rights issues and to establish a framework for accountability. These bodies are comprised of senior executives representing relevant business divisions and global support functions. Our Strategic Policy and Sustainability Council oversees human rights issues on behalf of our Company's Board of Directors.
- **Risk assessment and analysis** - We conduct human rights impact assessments to identify, assess and manage actual and potential adverse human rights impacts associated with our operations, and our supply chain. As part of this process, we engage with key stakeholders.
- **Employee training** - We integrate respect for human rights into our Company's annual Enterprise Management Training program. To ensure that our workforce is well-informed on the importance of respecting human rights and adhering to our ethical standards, training on salient human rights topics and annual refresher training on our Code of Conduct is provided to all employees.

- **Due diligence** - We conduct human rights due diligence (assessments/audits) to identify, assess and address potential and actual adverse human rights impacts associated with our operations and supply chain. Our human rights due diligence process is guided by the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.
- **Supply chain** - We have established a formal procedure and process for sourcing and acquiring goods and services from suppliers, involving supplier selection, negotiation, contracting, oversight, and monitoring. We communicate our expectations to suppliers and seek their assurance to conduct their operations in a socially responsible manner.
- **Monitoring** - We use key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure and track how effectively we are addressing our salient human rights issues. KPIs are reported to executives who have decision making responsibilities, including governance and oversight responsibilities.
- **Audit and assurance** - We have set up independent groups responsible for auditing our own operations to verify compliance with laws, regulations, and internal policies, including those associated with salient human rights issues. Using a risk-based approach, we use independent third parties to verify supplier compliance with our Company's expectations.
- **Collaboration and stakeholder engagement** - We collaborate and engage with relevant stakeholders, such as employees, employee business resource groups, works councils, labor unions, industry peers and human rights experts to gain insights, share best practices and improve our approach.
- **Grievance mechanisms / reporting channels** - We have established reporting channels to encourage and enable the reporting of potential misconduct, including any potential human rights violations. We provide multiple channels, through which reports can be made, including our [Speak Up](#) tool.
- **Response and remedy** - We maintain a Compliance Issues Visibility Response process to confidentially investigate and resolved allegations of misconduct, including known or suspected violations of our Code of Conduct, internal policies, the law and other forms of misconduct.
- **Reporting and disclosure** - We publicly communicate progress on our efforts to prevent human rights violations, through our Company's annual [Impact Report](#). This report uses Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB) and UN Global Compact reporting frameworks, amongst others.