

Working safely during COVID-19

Introduction

The UK Government published its plan for easing coronavirus lockdown measures on 11 May 2020. 'Our Plan to Rebuild: The UK Government's COVID-19 Recovery Strategy' includes an outline of when different parts of the economy can reopen.

The plan sets out a three-step approach for easing lockdown restrictions in England:

- Since 13 May, anyone who cannot work from home, such as workers in the construction and manufacturing sectors, should be encouraged to return to work.
- On 1 June, the UK Government started the phased reopening of some areas of the economy. The Government has confirmed non-essential retailers can start reopening from 15 June as long as they can demonstrate measures are in place to control coronavirus-related risks in line with current health and safety rules.
- From 4 July, the Government will reopen some of the remaining businesses that have been required to close.

This factsheet sets out how to manage social distancing in the workplace and work safely during COVID-19.

Key principles

The UK Government has published new 'COVID-19 Secure' guidelines to help employers reopen their businesses and ensure workplaces are operating as safely as possible. The guidance sets out practical steps for businesses focused on five key points:

- Employees should work from home if they can.
- Businesses should carry out a COVID-19 risk assessment, in consultation with workers or trade unions.
- Maintain social distancing wherever possible.
- Where people cannot be two metres apart, manage transmission risk.
- Reinforce cleaning processes.

Working safely during COVID-19

Risk assessments

Employers should carry out a COVID-19 risk assessment in consultation with their workers or trade unions. Employers need to think about the risks workers and others face, and take all reasonable steps to minimise them. The risk assessment must address the risks of COVID-19, and help inform decisions and control measures.

Employers should share the results of the risk assessment with their workforce. If possible, employers should publish the results of their risk assessments on their website, and the Government expects all businesses with over 50 employees to do this.

The Health and Safety Executive provides interactive tools to support businesses to complete risk assessments. Go to www.hse.gov.uk/risk/assessment/htm for more information.

Managing risks

Employers have a duty to reduce workplace risks to the lowest reasonably practicable level by taking preventative measures. To manage COVID-19 risks, businesses should take the following steps:

- Increase the frequency of handwashing and surface cleaning.

- Make every reasonable effort to enable working from home as a first option. Where working from home is not possible, workplaces should make every reasonable effort to comply with social distancing guidelines.
- Where social distancing guidelines cannot be followed in full in relation to a particular activity, businesses should consider whether that activity needs to continue for the business to operate. If so, take all mitigating actions possible to reduce the risk of transmission between staff. This could include:
 - Keeping the activity time involved as short as possible.
 - Using screens or barriers to separate people from each other.
 - Working back-to-back or side-to-side (rather than face-to-face) wherever possible.
 - Reducing the number of people each person has contact with by using fixed teams or partnering, so each person only works with a few others.

Who should go to work?

Under the Government's guidance, only those who cannot work from home should be encouraged to return to work. Employers should consider the following:

- Who is needed onsite, such as workers in business-critical roles or who are unable to work remotely.
- Plan for the minimum number of people needed onsite to operate safely and efficiently.
- Monitor the wellbeing of people who are working from home and support them to stay connected with the rest of the workforce.
- Keep in touch with off-site workers on their working arrangements, including their welfare, mental and physical health and personal security.
- Provide equipment for people to work at home safely and effectively, for example, remote access to work systems.
- Treat everyone in the workplace equally and fairly when applying the guidance. Employers should be mindful of the particular needs of different groups of workers or individuals.

Social distancing at work

Social distancing involves reducing day-to-day contact with other people as much as possible in order to reduce the spread of coronavirus. Workplaces should avoid crowding and limit opportunities for the virus to spread by maintaining a distance of at least two metres between individuals wherever possible.

From 4 July, where it is not possible to stay two metres apart, guidance will allow people to keep a social distance of 'one metre plus'. This means staying one metre apart, plus mitigations which reduce the risk of transmission.

Where social distancing guidelines cannot be followed in full in relation to a particular activity, businesses should consider whether that activity needs to continue for the business to operate. If so, take all mitigating actions possible to reduce the risk of transmission between staff.

Starting and leaving work

Businesses should take the following steps to maintain social distancing wherever possible:

- Stagger arrival, departure and break times to reduce crowding.
- Provide additional parking or facilities such as bike-racks to help people walk, run or cycle to work.
- Remind staff and customers to follow social distancing advice and wash their hands regularly.
- Provide additional handwashing facilities or hand sanitiser, including at all entry and exit points.
- Provide alternatives to touch-based security devices such as keypads.
- Provide more storage for workers' clothes and bags.
- Introduce one-way flow at entry and exit points.

Moving around the workplace

Businesses should take the following steps to maintain social distancing wherever possible while people travel through the workplace:

- Discourage non-essential trips within buildings and sites.
- Encourage the use of stairs, and reduce maximum occupancy for lifts.
- Regulate the use of high-traffic areas including corridors and walkways.
- Restrict access between different areas of a building or site.
- Where possible, introduce a one-way system for moving around the workplace.

Workplaces and workstations

Businesses should take the following steps to maintain social distancing between individuals when they are at their workstations:

- For people who work in one place, workstations should allow them to maintain social distancing wherever possible.
- Workstations should be assigned to an individual and not shared, as much as possible.
- Reconfigure the workplace layout to maintain social distancing.
- Only where it is not possible to move workstations further apart, arrange for people to work side-by-side or facing away from each other.
- Only where it is not possible to move workstations further apart, use screens to separate people from each other.
- Use a consistent pairing system if people have to work in close proximity.

Meetings

Businesses should take the following steps to maintain social distancing in meetings:

- Only hold meetings where necessary, and ensure hand sanitiser is available in meeting rooms.
- Meetings should be held in well-ventilated rooms.
- Avoid transmission during meetings, for example, by avoiding sharing pens.
- For areas where regular meetings take place, use floor signage to help people maintain social distancing.

Common areas

Businesses should take the following steps to maintain social distancing in common areas:

- Stagger break times.
- Use safe outdoor areas for breaks.
- Create additional space by using other parts of the workplace freed up by remote working.
- Encourage workers to bring their own food, or provide packaged meals to avoid fully opening staff canteens.
- Reconfigure seating and tables to reduce face-to-face interactions.

Managing the workforce

Shift patterns and working groups

Businesses should change the way work is organised to create distinct groups and reduce the number of contacts each worker has, including:

- As far as possible, where staff are split into teams or shift groups, fix these teams or shift groups so that where contact is unavoidable, this happens between the same people.
- Identify areas where people directly pass things to each other, for example office supplies, and find ways to remove direct contact, such as using drop-off points or transfer zones.

Work-related travel

Businesses should take the following steps to avoid unnecessary work travel and keep people safe when they do need to travel:

- Minimise non-essential travel.
- Minimise the number of people travelling together in any one vehicle.
- Clean shared vehicles between shifts or handovers.
- Put in place procedures to minimise person-to-person contact during deliveries to other sites.
- Maintain persistent pairing where two-person deliveries are required.
- Minimise contact during payments and exchange of documentation, such as electronically signed documents.

Communications and training

Businesses should take the following steps to ensure workers understand COVID-19 related safety procedures:

- Provide clear and regular communication about new ways of working.
- Engage with workers and representatives through existing communication channels to agree and explain any changes to working arrangements.
- Develop training and communication materials for workers prior to their return to site.
- Show awareness about the importance of mental health at times of uncertainty.
- Use simple and clear messaging to explain guidelines.

Managing customers, visitors and contractors

Businesses should take the following steps to minimise unnecessary visits to workplaces:

- Encourage visits via a remote connection.
- Where site visits are required, explain guidance on social distancing and hygiene to visitors prior to and on arrival.
- Review entry and exit routes for visitors to minimise contact with other people.
- Ensure people who greet and host visitors understand their responsibilities relating to COVID-19.
- Limit the number of visitors at any one time.
- Limit visitors to a specific time window.
- Revise visitor arrangements to ensure social distancing and hygiene.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and face coverings

PPE

The Government guidance confirms that when managing the risk of COVID-19, additional PPE beyond what you usually wear will not be beneficial in the majority of workplaces.

Unless you are in a situation where the risk of COVID-19 transmission is very high, such as when offering close contact services, your risk assessment should reflect the fact that the role of PPE in providing additional protection is extremely limited. However, if your risk assessment does show that PPE is required, then you must provide this PPE free of charge to workers who need it. Any PPE provided must fit properly.

Face coverings

It is important to use face coverings properly and wash your hands before putting them on and taking them off. Employers should support their workers in using face coverings safely if they choose to wear one. This means telling workers:

- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser before putting a face covering on, and after removing it.
- When wearing a face covering, avoid touching your face or face covering, as you could contaminate them with germs from your hands.
- Change your face covering if it becomes damp or if you've touched it.
- Continue to wash your hands regularly.
- Change and wash your face covering daily.
- If the material is washable, wash in line with manufacturer's instructions. If it's not washable, dispose of it carefully in your usual waste.
- Maintain social distancing wherever possible.

Passengers using public transport in England will be required to wear face-coverings from 15 June.

Cleaning the workplace

Before reopening the workplace, it is important to carry out cleaning procedures and provide hand sanitiser.

To keep workplaces clean and prevent transmission by touching contaminated surfaces, businesses should:

- Ensure frequent cleaning of work areas and equipment between use.
- Ensure frequent cleaning of objects and surfaces that are touched regularly.
- Clear workspaces and remove waste and belongings from the work area at the end of shift.
- Limit or restrict the use of high-touch items where possible.

Hygiene

Businesses should take the following steps to help everyone maintain good hygiene through the working day:

- Display signs and posters to build awareness of good hygiene practices.
- Provide regular reminders and signage to maintain personal hygiene standards.
- Provide hand sanitiser in multiple locations.
- Set clear use and cleaning guidelines for toilets, as well as shower and changing facilities if required.
- Enhance cleaning for busy areas.
- Provide more waste facilities and more frequent rubbish collection.

Handling materials and onsite vehicles

To reduce transmission through contact with objects that come into the workplace and vehicles at the worksite, businesses should:

- Establish cleaning procedures for materials entering the site, as well as procedures for vehicles.
- Introduce greater handwashing facilities for workers handling materials.
- Ensure regular cleaning of vehicles that workers may take home.
- Restrict non-business deliveries, such as personal deliveries to workers.

Inbound and outbound goods

Businesses should take the following steps to maintain social distancing and avoid surface transmission when goods enter and leave the site:

- Revise pick-up and drop-off collection points, procedures and signage.
- Minimise unnecessary contact, such as by using non-contact delivery options.
- Consider ways to reduce the frequency of deliveries, such as ordering larger quantities less often.
- Where possible, use the same pairs of people for loads where more than one person is needed.
- Encourage drivers to stay in their vehicles where possible.

Advice for specific sectors

Businesses that reopen will be required to follow COVID-19 Secure guidelines, which are safety guidelines that set out how different types of physical space can be adapted to operate safely. The guidelines will help keep the risk of infection as low as possible, as well as support people to return to work safely.

The UK Government has been consulting relevant sectors, industry bodies, local authorities, trade unions, the Health and Safety Executive and Public Health England on their development. It has published guides about working safely during coronavirus that cover a range of different types of work:

- Construction and outdoor work
- Factories, plants and warehouses
- Labs and research facilities
- Offices and contact centres
- Working in other people's homes
- Restaurants, pubs, bars and takeaway services
- Shops and branches
- Vehicles
- Close contact services
- The visitor economy
- Hotels and other guest accommodation

To read the guidance, go to www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19.

Further information

Public Health England: 'Guidance for employers and businesses on coronavirus (COVID-19)'

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/guidance-for-employers-and-businesses-on-coronavirus-covid-19>

Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy: 'Working safely during coronavirus (COVID-19)'

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>



SUPPORTED BY
MAYOR OF LONDON

DISCLAIMER While all reasonable efforts have been made, the publisher makes no warranties that this information is accurate and up-to-date.

