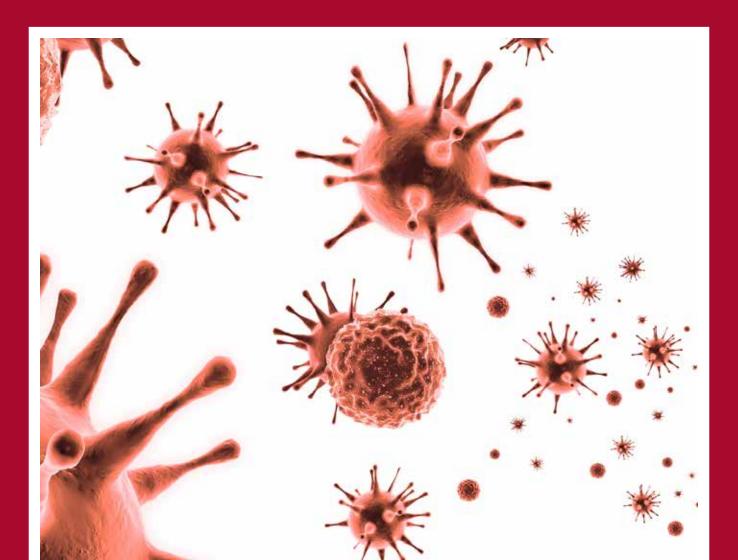HSE

Working safely during the coronavirus pandemic – a short guide

Who this guide is for

This guide is aimed at all employers and those who are self-employed and work with or near other people. It explains how you can protect people from coronavirus (COVID-19) in your workplace, for example by putting in place social distancing measures, staggering shifts and providing additional handwashing facilities.

The guidance may also be useful to workers and their representatives.

Assessing risk

As an employer, you must protect people from harm. This includes taking reasonable steps to protect your workers and others from coronavirus. This is called a risk assessment and it'll help you manage risk and protect people.

You must:

● identify what work activity or situations might cause transmission of the virus;
● think about who could be at risk;
● decide how likely it is that someone could be exposed;
● act to remove the activity or situation, or if this isn't possible, control the risk.

If you have fewer than five employees, you don't have to write anything down, but it might help if you do. Find out more about managing risk and risk assessment (www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/risk/index.htm).

You should consider groups who may be at higher risk of infection and/or poorer outcomes if infected with COVID-19. The Public Health England report *Disparities in the risk and outcomes of COVID-19* (www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-review-of-disparities-in-risks-and-outcomes) identified higher-risk groups, including those who:

● are older males;
● have a high body mass index (BMI);
● have health conditions such as diabetes;
● are from some Black, Asian or minority ethnicity (BAME) backgrounds.

The full findings can be found in the report.

There are currently no expectations of additional controls for these groups or individual risk assessments. But you should make sure they have individual discussions with their managers about their concerns and explain what is in place to protect them.

Specific advice for your industry

This general guide is aimed at all work environments.
There is more specific guidance for industries or sectors at:
www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19

Talking with your workers

To help you let people know what they need to do to protect themselves, we have a separate guide on *Talking to your workers during the coronavirus pandemic* (www.hse.gov.uk/news/assets/docs/talking-with-your-workers.pdf).

You should also decide how you will tell people who don't have English as their first language and others who may struggle with written and verbal communication.

Who should go to work?

You should think about:

- where and how your work is carried out, consider if there are jobs and tasks that can be changed to reduce risk;
- identifying everyone in your business who can work from home – if they can, they should;
- providing equipment needed for employees to work safely and effectively at home (for example laptops, mobile phones, video conferencing equipment);
- keeping in regular contact with people working from home, making sure you discuss their wellbeing and helping them to feel they are still part of the workforce;
- where it is not be possible to work from home, the guidance on social distancing and hygiene (handwashing with soap and water often, for at least 20 seconds) should be followed;
- the minimum number of people needed to carry out work tasks safely.

Protecting people who are at higher risk

You should think about:

- planning for clinically extremely vulnerable (shielding) workers who must not work outside the home;
- planning for people working at home who have someone shielding in their household;
- helping workers at increased risk to work from home, either in their current role or an alternative role;
- where people at increased risk cannot work from home, offering them the safest available roles;
- planning for people who need to self-isolate.

Getting into and leaving work

You should think about:

- identifying where people can travel alone in their own transport (or walk, or cycle if it is safe to do so) when getting to and from work to maintain social distancing;
- staggering arrival and departure times so people can keep to the social distancing rules by not using entry/exit points at the same time;
- providing handwashing facilities (running water, soap and paper towels or electrical dryers) at entry/exit points. People should be able to wash their hands when they get to work and leave. If this is not possible, provide hand sanitiser.

Work area

You should think about how you can organise your work area so that people can follow Public Health England guidelines on social distancing (www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19), where possible:

- physically arrange work areas so people can socially distance;
- mark areas using floor paint or tape to help people social distance;
- provide signage to remind people to keep social distance;
- avoid people working face-to-face, for example working side-by-side.

Where you cannot social distance, you should think about:

- assigning one person per work area;
- reducing the number of people in the work area;
- assigning and keeping people to shift teams (sometimes known as a cohort), that is people on the same shift working in the same teams, to limit social interaction;
- keeping the number of people who cannot social distance to a minimum;
- using screens to create a physical barrier between people.

You need to think about how to keep the work area clean and prevent transmission by touching contaminated surfaces. You should consider the following:

- decide on how frequently you need to clean the work area, equipment and vehicles, for example cleaning at the end of each use if equipment is shared between people or between shift changeovers;
- identify objects and surfaces that are touched regularly and decide how frequently you clean them;
- provide hand sanitiser for people getting in and out of vehicles or handling deliveries, if they are unable to wash their hands.

Moving around

You need to think about how people travel through work environments.

- Permit only essential trips within buildings, sites and properties, to maintain social distancing as much as possible.
- Restrict the amount that people rotate between jobs and equipment.
- Limit the number of people who use lifts and work vehicles.
- Reduce the number of people in high traffic areas including lifts, corridors, turnstiles and walkways.
- Mark areas using floor paint or tape to help people social distance.
- Consider introducing temporary pedestrian walkways to allow people to maintain social distancing when moving around.

Common areas

You should review the common areas used in your business including canteens, toilets, showers, and changing facilities. You need to think about:

- physically moving tables/chairs so people can social distance;
- staggering breaktimes so that people are not using break rooms, canteens, rest areas or changing facilities at the same time to maintain social distancing;
- where this is not possible, creating additional space for people to take their breaks in;
- marking areas using floor paint or tape to help people social distance;
- using outside areas for breaks if the locations are suitable and it is safe to do so;
- encouraging workers to stay on-site during working hours.

Where you cannot social distance, you need to think about how to keep common areas clean and prevent transmission by touching contaminated surfaces. You should think about:

- how frequently you need to clean the common areas of your business;
- identifying objects and surfaces that are touched regularly and decide how frequently you clean them;
- setting clear guidance for the use of rest areas, toilets, showers, and changing facilities to make sure they are kept clean.

Good hygiene

You need to think about:

- ensuring that you have handwashing facilities that provide running water, soap and paper towels or electrical dryers;
- providing hand sanitiser in addition to washing facilities;
- using signs and posters to increase awareness of good handwashing technique;
- providing regular reminders on avoiding touching your face and to cough/sneeze into your arm;
- providing hand sanitiser in multiple locations in addition to washrooms;
- setting clear guidance for the cleaning of toilets, showers and changing facilities to make sure they are kept clean;
- setting clear guidance on how to handle goods, merchandise and materials and when cleaning procedures need to be followed.

Information and guidance

You need to think about:

- providing people (including workers and others) with information on procedures, guidance or ways of working that have been introduced;
- sharing this information with them before they start work;
- sharing this information with others who are not your workers (for example visitors, customers or contractors), where required. This could include signs or notices;
- how you will pass information and guidance to people who don't have English as their first language and others who may struggle with written and verbal communication;
- holding conversations with your workers, listening to and acting on their concerns.

PPE (personal protective equipment)

- Continue providing the PPE that you normally use to protect yourself or workers, for example exposure to wood dust, flour, welding fume, silica dust.

Further information

HSE's latest news and advice on coronavirus (www.hse.gov.uk/news/coronavirus.htm)

There is more specific guidance for your industry or sector. You can find details at www.gov.uk/workingsafely

For information about health and safety, or to report inconsistencies or inaccuracies in this guidance, visit www.hse.gov.uk

You can order HSE priced publications at https://books.hse.gov.uk

HSE priced publications are also available from bookshops.

This publication is available at: www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/working-safely