

Returning to Work

COVID-19 Safety in the workplace



On 10 May 2020, the Government announced its plans to ease lockdown restrictions and enable certain sectors in England to return to work. Whilst the Government is continuing to encourage home working where possible, many organisations will begin to make plans to reopen offices and bring furloughed staff back to work.

We have prepared the below practical steps to a COVID-19 safe workplace. Keeping employees safe physically, emotionally and mentally is the primary goal of the precautions listed below.



1. RISK ASSESSMENT

To help you decide which actions to take, you need to carry out an appropriate COVID-19 risk assessment, just as you would for other health and safety-related hazards.

This risk assessment must be done in consultation with unions or workers.

For more information, please view [this government guide](#). It contains useful information about which best practices to employ to ensure a safe working environment.



2. EMPLOYEE CARE

- Create policies for deciding who returns and when
- Consult with staff and consider their concerns (childcare issues, employees who are shielding or have family members who are shielding)
- It is vital to have re-orientation or re-induction process for returning staff
- Acknowledge the fear of returning to work and infection and offer support internally or through an Employee Assistance Programme
- Consider one to one meetings with returning employees to discuss concerns and changes
- Consider the benefits of staff returning to work and the effect on productivity from proximity to colleagues, socialising, work tools and resources
- Consider the benefits of working from home (Health & Family priorities and reduced commute time; the use of technology)
- Develop and execute detailed plan on return



3. SAFE PREMISES

Ensure that any site or location that has been fully closed or partially operated is ready to restart. This will involve:

Cleaning

- Prepare adequate cleaning plans
- Carry out a deep-clean before you reopen
- Consider changes to cleaning scope/ additional services
- As stronger cleaning products may be required, ensure these are approved products

Pre-return inspections

- HVAC checks (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning)
- Fire security checks
- Legionella in the water systems checks
- Ensure all inspections, remediations, repairs and communications are complete before re-opening

Landlord

- Ensure compliance with landlord requirements and policies

Vendors

- Engage vendors in back-to-work plan to work
- Advise on alternate means of safe commuting (i.e. walking or cycling)
- Prepare and post reminders of social distancing and cleaning protocols



4. MOVING AROUND BUILDINGS

Control key access points to allow social distancing wherever possible.

- Implement new rules for health & safety checks
- Consider key access points: building reception; deliveries and post; lifts and visitors
- Reconfigure gathering and collaborative areas for social distancing, such as breakout areas and canteens
- Consider temperature screening for all employees
- Provide hand sanitiser and PPE



5. SOCIAL DISTANCING MEASURES

Decrease density and regulate high traffic areas to allow social distancing.

- Consider measures to reduce traffic of staff
- Staggering arrival and departure times to prevent crowding
- Shift patterns and work groups to reduce contact
- Allow staff to alternate between office and home to reduce number of staff onsite
- Plan a phased return of staff based on roles and priorities
- Include staff in planning their office schedule where possible
- Review seating assignment and modify as necessary
- Enforce stringent cleaning protocols for shared spaces
- Reduce capacity of space by removing some chairs from large meeting rooms
- Direct foot traffic where possible to single direction
- Implement floor markings to indicate safe distance



6. INCREASE CLEANING AND MINIMISE HIGH-TOUCH POINTS

Ensure workplace is clean and ready to restart and reduce touch points to prevent transmission.

- Disable touch-based devices where possible or provide hand sanitisers at these points
- Increase cleaning of objects and surfaces that are touched regularly, such as door handles, light switches, taps, printers and keyboards
- Organise enhanced cleaning for busy areas and showers/ changing facilities
- Implement and maintain clean desk policy for effective cleaning
- Designate a specific room for isolation purposes for anyone showing symptoms
- Supply additional cleaning products
- Remove food and beverages, no fruit deliveries, close fridge, microwave
- Encourage employees to bring own lunch in coolers with own cutlery where possible
- Sanitise all work space and collaborative working areas
- Open windows and doors frequently to encourage ventilation, where possible



7. TRAINING AND COMMUNICATIONS

It is key to ensure sure all workers understand COVID-19 related safety procedures and are kept up to date with safety measures.

- Provide clear, consistent and regular communication
- Arrange training or webinars on H&S guidelines and use of PPE where applicable
- Make employees aware of their responsibilities (observing the distance, frequently washing hands etc.)
- Establish a two way communication methods and listen to employee's concerns
- Clearly set out employee expectations and a focus on making them feel safe and secure
- Communicate policies for: Return to work, Guest and visitors, Employee travel, Sickness absence & reporting; Support for caregivers etc
- Continuously reinforce handwashing, social distancing and staying home when ill
- Increased signage on hand washing throughout the business
- Appoint Health & Safety Champions across the business who monitor compliance with procedures and provide support to staff



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