adviceⁿⁱ

the independent advice network

Post-COVID Guidelines for the Advice Sector:

Benching-marking against other sectors

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Post-COVID Guidelines for the Advice Sector:
Benching-marking against other sectors

Note: This is suggested guidance going forward in various sectors, during and post-COVID.
It looks at what is being implemented in similar, client-facing settings.
Adapt/adopt the procedures that keep your employees and clients safe.
Not all suggestions will be applicable for your circumstances/organisation.
Hyperlinks in the content page take you to templates for risk assessments etc.
Note that COVID guidelines change rapidly, continue to check nidirect for government updates.

Contents

NOTE: This document has embedded links to allow you to navigate quickly to and from the different sections, as well as ***Back to Top*** links between sections. For all links, hover over them and press ***Click*** or press ***Control-Click***.

Client-facing Guidance in Various Sectors

Doctor's Surgeries

Managing appointments:
- All clients should be triaged remotely, by phone or online, to decide if face-to-face appointment is needed.
- Patients told to inform the surgery if they develop symptoms of COVID-19 before the appointment.
- Online bookings are available but they should only allow telephone, online or video appointments.
- All face-to-face appointments must involve strict infection control procedures.
- Minimise the number of face-to-face appointments by getting as much as possible done in a single appointment.
- Appointment planning in necessary to minimise waiting times and maintain social distancing in waiting areas.
- Should ask if client is shielding.

Delivering appointments:
- All care that can be done remotely should be done that way and offered to clients when appropriate.
- If video consultation capability is available, that should be offered. Commercial products such as Skype, WhatsApp or Facetime can be considered if alternative channels are not available.
- Practices should display coronavirus patient information posters so that they can be seen before patients enter the surgery. They should also be visible in reception, waiting areas and at patient access points to clinical areas.

Home visits:
- These are recommended for clients who are shielding or at risk, and where they are unable to accept help remotely by phone or virtually, for whatever reason.
- If a visit is necessary, it should be done by staff who are not: a risk to the client; or at high risk themselves. Both the client and the staff member will need to agree to the meeting despite any risk.
- The number of staff visiting a client's home should be limited as much as possible, particularly for shielded patients. Staff visiting the patient should consider whether they can perform duties of other staff to avoid multiple visits.

Protecting staff:
- Staff with symptoms of COVID-19 Staff with symptoms of COVID-19 should stay at home as per advice for the public.

- Staff who are well enough to continue working from home should be supported to do so.
- If staff become unwell with symptoms of COVID-19 while at work, they should stop work immediately and go home. This guidance also applies to staff with a household member with symptoms of COVID-19.
- Staff who are extremely clinically vulnerable from COVID-19 (shielded staff) should work from home with all possible support in place. Staff exposed to someone with symptoms of COVID-19 in healthcare settings PHE has published guidance for healthcare workers who have been exposed to someone with symptoms of COVID-19 in healthcare settings.

Key messages:
- All practices should move to a total triage model as rapidly as possible to protect patients and staff from avoidable risks of infection.
- Practices should manage patients remotely (online, phone, video) and any pre-booked appointments should be converted to remote appointments unless face-to-face contact is absolutely clinically necessary.
- Turn off online pre-bookable appointments and, instead, triage all demand.

Data supporting remote working for surgeries:
- Research shows they also improve access for people with specific information and communication needs, including those with a disability or hearing loss, carers and people who feel apprehensive about accessing health services – e.g. for a mental health, sensitive or embarrassing problem.
- Telephone functionality helps ensure equity of access for non-digital users.

Back to top

Pharmacies

- Placing posters, banners or signs on display in a prominent position is essential in alerting patients about the services the pharmacy can provide at this time.
- Some pharmacies have found that placing a sign on the door for patients and customers to read before they enter is a suitable way to ensure only those who need to enter the store do so, or may simply set out the limits to the number of people entering at one time.
- Social media or website are other places where guidance should be highlighted. In addition, these are a useful for sharing information relating to: when it is suitable for individuals to visit the pharmacy; advice for patients on how to best manage their health during isolation; access to sick notes for those who are unable to work — you can explain how they can obtain online isolation notes to provide proof of COVID-19-related absence from work; who to contact if patients are concerned about their symptoms (e.g. using NHS 111 online).

Solicitors Offices

Checklist for continuing to work:
- Ensure staff have a suitable homeworking environment including good equipment and Internet connection.
- Ensure documents and emails are available online to all relevant staff.
- Ensure it's possible for staff to collaborate on documents and make video conference calls with colleagues.
- Ensure it's possible to video conference call with clients, other law firms and stakeholders.
- Ensure you can access online versions of legal forms.

General Businesses

Supporting employees' return to work:
- A key concern among businesses is likely to be around supporting employees to safely return to work. This includes any staff on furlough, as well as those who will have to adjust to getting back to the office after a period of working from home.
- Employers will need to be prepared for some staff finding the transition difficult and should ensure they are geared up for dealing appropriately with any mental health concerns.
- Employers face a number of practical issues in establishing when and how staff start to come back into the premises. This could involve a phased return, having team members on site on different days, operating staggered shifts or making changes to break times to maintain social distancing. Businesses may also have to provide PPE to keep staff safe.

Dealing with some staff not returning:
- It is inevitable that, after an extended time away from work, some people will choose not to return. In this case, employees will need to give notice in the usual way and employers will have to decide whether or not staff work their notice period.
- It is likely that employees with some health conditions will need to continue to self-isolate, as others start to return to the workplace. Employers should therefore be prepared to make arrangements for some staff to continue homeworking if that is possible or to extend their furloughed leave, if the scheme is still available, or use sick leave if not.

Enabling changes to working patterns and job roles:

- Some businesses may want to continue with a level of homeworking in the future. In addition to offering some employees a better work-life balance, it could also be a significant cost saving for employers. It is likely that some staff will want to continue to work from home, at least some of the time, or perhaps alter their working patterns. To prepare for such requests, employers should ensure their flexible working policies are up-to-date and fit-for-purpose.
- Businesses will now have to consider whether they want to make any more permanent changes to their systems and to people's roles and responsibilities.
- Employers must ensure they reflect any substantial changes in employment contracts and in the staff handbook.

Reviewing the business structure:
- Any businesses making changes to their structure must ensure that decisions made are properly documented. This includes recording decisions made during video or phone calls and by email.

Reviewing your commercial property needs:
- With the likely increase in homeworking and many companies diversifying and restructuring, business owners are likely to be considering whether their current commercial property reflects their future business needs. For example, offices may need to be adapted to fit with employees' flexible working patterns, while manufacturing businesses' property needs could change as they continue to branch out with new ventures.

Embracing new technology:
- Businesses should review how they have been using technology to communicate with their teams, meet customers, manage stock and connect with professional contacts, and what they can take forward into the future.

Client confidentiality during remote working:
- All firms must have measures in place to keep client's information confidential - it is required both by law. Most firms will already have in place arrangements to protect client information for remote workers. This could include providing limited information to those workers who do not usually work from home and may not have access to secure IT or other adequate equipment.
- Details should be documented of the arrangements put in place to keep client's information confidential.

Back to top

Workplace Guidance

HSE 5 Steps to Working Safely

1. **Carry out a COVID-19 risk assessment:**
   Before restarting work, ensure the safety of the workplace by:
   a) carrying out a risk assessment in line with the HSE guidance (https://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/risk/index.htm)
   b) consulting with workers or trade unions
   c) sharing the results of the risk assessment with the workforce.

2. **Develop cleaning, handwashing and hygiene procedures:**
   Increase the frequency of handwashing and surface cleaning by:
   a) encouraging people to follow the guidance on hand washing and hygiene (https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/best-way-to-wash-your-hands/)
   b) providing hand sanitiser around the workplace, in addition to washrooms
   c) frequently cleaning and disinfecting objects and surfaces that are touched regularly
   d) enhancing cleaning for busy areas
   e) setting clear use and cleaning guidance for toilets
   f) providing hand drying facilities – either paper towels or electrical dryers

3. **Help people to work from home:**
   You should take all reasonable steps to help people work from home by:
   a) discussing home working arrangements
   b) ensuring they have the right equipment, like remote access to work systems
   c) including them in all necessary communications
   d) looking after their physical and mental wellbeing

4. **Maintain 2m social distancing, where possible:**
   Where possible, you should maintain 2m between people by:
   a) putting up signs to remind workers and visitors of social distancing guidance
   b) avoiding sharing workstations
   c) using floor tape or paint to mark areas to help people keep to a 2m distance
   d) arranging one-way traffic through the workplace if possible
   e) switching to seeing visitors by appointment only if possible

5. **Where people cannot be 2m apart, manage transmission risk:**

Where it's not possible for people to be 2m apart, you should do everything practical to manage the transmission risk by:
   a) considering whether an activity needs to continue for the business to operate
   b) using screens or barriers to separate people from each other
   c) using back-to-back or side-to-side working whenever possible
   d) staggering arrival and departure times
   e) reducing the number of people each person has contact with by using 'fixed teams or partnering'

PHA COVID Testing and Tracing

Anyone over the age of 5 who is showing symptoms of COVID-19 is now eligible for testing. PHA contact tracers will telephone those who test positive. Employees can be advised of their testing and tracing available to them. The PHA have details on their website:
   - For testing: the PHA provides information on when to get tested and how to arrange a test; on the testing available for care home staff, members of the public and essential workers; on testing centres and home tests; see https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/covid-19-coronavirus/testing-and-tracing-covid-19/testing-covid-19
   - For tracing: the PHA provides information on how contact tracing works, why contact tracers might call an individual and what kind of questions then ask, why contact tracing is important, what digital platforms are being used to support contact tracing and how they protect your data; see https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/covid-19-coronavirus/testing-and-tracing-covid-19/contact-tracing-faqs

General Advice for Workplaces

Make an office COVID-19 secure:
   - A good place to start is reviewing layouts and processes to allow people to work further apart from each other
   - Consider using floor tape to mark areas to help workers keep to a 2m distance
   - Where it is not possible to move workstations further apart, using screens to separate people from each other
   - Manage occupancy levels to enable social distancing
   - Avoid use of hot desks, however, for instance in call centres or training facilities where this might not be possible, clean workstations between different occupants including shared equipment

- Frequently clean objects and surfaces that are touched regularly, such as door handles and keyboards, and making sure there are adequate disposal arrangements
- The government has laid out some key areas for offices to focus their efforts on. These include:

For meetings:
- Use remote working tools to avoid in-person meetings, if possible
- Only absolutely necessary participants should attend meetings and should maintain 2m separation throughout
- Avoid sharing pens and other objects
- Providing hand sanitiser in meeting rooms
- Holding meetings outdoors or in well-ventilated rooms whenever possible
- For areas where regular meetings take place, use floor signage to help people maintain social distancing

Lunch and work breaks:
- Stagger break times to reduce pressure on break rooms or canteens
- Use safe outside areas for breaks
- Create additional space by using other parts of the workplace or building that have been freed up by remote working
- Install screens to protect staff in receptions or similar areas
- Provide packaged meals or something similar and avoid fully opening staff canteens
- Encourage workers to bring their own food
- Reconfigure seating and tables to maintain spacing and reduce face-to-face interactions
- Encourage staff to remain on-site and, when not possible, maintaining social distancing while off-site

Office visitors and communication:
- Determine if schedules for essential services and contractor visits can be revised to reduce interaction and overlap between people, for example, carrying out services at night
- Maintain a record of all visitors, if this is practical
- Provide clear guidance on social distancing and hygiene to people on arrival with signage or visual aids and before arrival, by phone, on your website or by email
- Establish host responsibilities relating to Covid-19 and providing any necessary training for people who act as hosts for visitors
- Review entry and exit routes for visitors and contractors to minimise contact with other people

- Provide clear, consistent and regular communication to improve understanding of Covid-19 security measures

Deliveries and office supplies:
- Restrict non-business deliveries, for example, personal deliveries to workers
- Identify areas where people directly pass things to each other, for example office supplies, and finding ways to remove direct contact, such as using drop-off points or transfer zones
- Companies are advised to overhaul their current pick-up and drop-off collection points, introduce spaces where keeping social distancing measures is possible and make sure they are followed with signage and markings
- Electronically processing deliveries with a pre-booking system can also help reduce contact at security points
- When safe to do so, single employees should unload or load vehicles
- By altering frequency of deliveries, such as ordering a larger quantity of goods less often, can help reduce contact with workers outside of your business

Ventilation:
- The business department has underlined the importance of properly ventilated spaces in each of its eight reports
- Check whether you need to service or adjust ventilation systems
- Most air conditioning system do not need adjustment, however where systems serve multiple buildings or you are unsure, advice can be sought from your heating ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) engineers or advisers
- Opening windows and doors frequently can also help improve ventilation of buildings and offices

Working Safely

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 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.

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 2m social distancing rules by not using entry/exit points at the same time;
- providing handwashing facilities (running water, soap and paper towels) 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 you can keep people 2m apart, where possible:
- physically arrange work areas to keep people 2m apart;
- mark areas using floor paint or tape to help people keep a 2m distance;
- provide signage to remind people to keep a 2m distance;
- avoid people working face-to-face, for example working side-by-side.

Where you cannot keep a 2m physical 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 working less than 2 m apart 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 keep a 2m 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 they are 2m apart;

- staggering break-times 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 keep a 2m 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 keep a 2m physical 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.

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.

Social Distancing in Workplaces

Areas and tasks where social distancing is more difficult:
- If you share your workplace with others, you will need to decide how you can manage this. You should identify areas where you may come into contact with others and decide what plans need to be agreed and put in place to keep the 2m distance.

- If your work involves tasks where you need to be close to customers or others, you need to identify these and plan your social distancing.
- Where equipment and vehicles are shared between workers, think about allocating one piece of equipment per person, or whether you should do something else to keep people safe.
- Where there are tasks that need 2 people and they can't be more than 2m apart, first see if you can redesign the task so only one person is needed, e.g. using lifting aids.
- Identify which areas of your work people congregate in, e.g. rest rooms, smoking shelters, welfare facilities, waiting rooms or meeting rooms.

Changing work and tasks to keep social distancing:
- Change or redesign tasks so that they only need one person to complete them or 2m distance can be maintained.
- Change when and where people work to reduce numbers of people in work.
- Use markers on floors to help people keep 2m distance.
- Stagger breaks and start/end times.
- Limit the number of people doing tasks at the same time. This could be limiting the number of people in a work area. If people are going into someone's home e.g. (for personal care or to do maintenance tasks) ask those who don't need to be there to wait in another room. If this isn't possible, then keep 2m separation or follow hygiene procedures.
- Use more than one exit or entry to reduce numbers of people coming together.
- Use 'virtual' ways (online etc.) to discuss tasks or meet with customers. If customers do need to come to your workplace, decide how you are going to plan the number and type of visitors. Having timed appointments is a good way of managing this.
- During loading and unloading, drivers should either be in their cabs or a waiting area.
- Where you can, use contactless deliveries so people don't need to get too close.
- Deactivate contractors' passes to stop them coming to your workplace unless it's planned.

Where it isn't possible to keep social distancing:
- Reduce face-to-face contact, e.g. people working back to back. To prevent infection, have hand sanitiser in addition to washing facilities and keep work areas clean.

Questions to help plan how you will socially distance:
- In our work where will social distancing be more difficult? What areas or tasks are more likely to increase the risk?
- Think about tasks or parts of work that mean you need close contact with others.

- How can we change work and tasks so people keep 2m apart or are separate?
- Think about customers and contractors, as well as employees.
- What work or tasks are we unable to do while maintaining social distancing?
- Think about areas of work where you need, or can't avoid, close contact with other people.
- What could be put in place to help with any of the issues you have talked about?
- Think about what you can do yourself, and what else could be done by your line manager and your business or organisation.

Organising your Workplace

Reorganising the workplace:
- Look at the flow of work to see if it's possible to reorganise it to remove opportunities for coronavirus to be spread. Where this isn't possible, reduce the chances of it spreading by putting in place social distancing and cleaning measures.
- Move workstations around so people are separated.
- Move chairs and tables in rest areas so people are more than 2 m apart or sitting back to back.
- In welfare facilities, close cubicles to limit contact between people.
- In meeting rooms, organise tables and chairs to keep 2m distance or remove tables and chairs.
- You will already have measures in place to reduce risks from work tasks. Make sure any changes you make don't make these less effective.

Additional facilities or changes:
- Use screens to separate areas where people work or have contact.
- Put markings on floors to show 2 m distances or to show people where to stand.
- Door handles, keypads and turnstiles can be changed to reduce surface contact, e.g. using automatic door openers, changing touch keypads for contactless ways to get in and out of buildings.
- Provide hand drying facilities – either paper towels or electrical dryers. Empty bins frequently to safely dispose of waste.

Doing something different:
- Where possible, allocate one workstation and piece of equipment per person. If this isn't possible, provide cleaning equipment at the workstation so it can be cleaned between uses.
- Provide hand sanitiser and/or washing facilities where people are working so they can clean and sanitise hands as required.

- Think about how workers could be grouped so they routinely work together in groupings or pairings to reduce the amount of contact across different workers.
- Put in place systems such as 'one in, one out' in welfare facilities if it isn't possible to maintain social distancing.
- Leave doors open that can be left open (taking fire safety into consideration) to reduce the need for people to touch door handles.

Questions to help plan how you will organise your workplace:
- Can we reorganise our workplace to reduce the likelihood that coronavirus will spread?
- Think about where people physically work or complete tasks as well as where they may need to go as part of their work.
- Do we need to add or change things in our work to reduce the likelihood of spreading coronavirus?
- Think about providing extra facilities or change how people use equipment.
- Are there some tasks or work that we can't reorganise where we need to do something different?
- Think about tasks that can be assigned to one person. If this isn't possible, then think about how work groups can be organised so they regularly work together.
- What could be put in place to help with any of the issues you have talked about?
- Think about what you can do yourself, and what else could be done by your line manager and your business or organisation.

Cleaning and Sanitising

What needs cleaning and sanitising:
- Common areas of workplaces are likely to have areas that need cleaning such as door handles, handrails and keypads.

Making cleaning easier and reducing the need to clean:
- Keeping surfaces clear of objects makes it easier to clean and reduces the number of things that can become contaminated, e.g. on work surfaces, in vehicles etc.
- Provide hand drying facilities – either paper towels or electrical dryers. Empty bins frequently to safely dispose of waste.
- Provide hand sanitiser to people when it isn't possible for people to wash their hands straight away.
- Put in place 'clean as you use systems' for areas such as meeting rooms, printers etc., to keep up with cleaning requirements.

- If customers or others need to come to your work, put in place measures to ensure the areas they will go to are clean and cleaned after the visit.

Who will do the cleaning and when?
- Decide if the cleaning arrangements you currently have in place are enough to ensure cleaning is done throughout the times you are working.
- If cleaners come to work once-a-day, then you may need to think about what extra cleaning will need to be done during the day.
- You may choose different levels of cleaning for different areas. Deep cleaning once a day and then supplementary cleaning, e.g. wiping high-contact surfaces throughout the day, might need to be followed.
- 'Clean and sanitise as you go' may need to be put in place for areas such as meeting rooms, printers etc.
- If people can't clean straight after touching surfaces, then provide hand sanitiser.
- When deciding who will do the cleaning you need to provide information and instruction to ensure they know what to clean and how to make sure it's effective. For higher-risk cleaning areas you will need to make sure people know what to do to protect themselves.
- Signs around the workplace can be a good way of letting people know what they need to do to keep it clean and sanitised.

Questions to help plan how you will clean and sanitise during work:
- What areas of the workplace are regularly touched by workers and need cleaning and sanitising?
- Think about shared areas or equipment and places where people need to regularly touch surfaces for their work.
- What can we do to reduce the need to clean or to make cleaning easier and more effective?
- Think about how you can reduce contact with surfaces or what practical things you can do to make cleaning easier.
- Who will do the cleaning?
- Think about the cleaning arrangements we have in place already. Will they ensure cleaning is done when needed, e.g. during the day?
- Think about the information and training of those cleaning – have they already got enough information to be able to do this?
- What could be put in place to help with any of the issues you have talked about?
- Think about what you can do yourself, and what else could be done by your line manager and your business or organisation.

Information and Guidance

Deciding what information and guidance you need:
- Decide what people need to know so they can continue working safely. This could include:
  - changes to when and where breaks happen;
  - times people arrive and leave work;
  - when they need to clean parts of their work areas; and
  - when they should be washing hands and/or using sanitiser.
- Decide the best way to pass on information and guidance to your workers. Bear in mind any situations where workers are in different buildings or places, as you may need to choose a number of different ways to communicate with them. Think about people who don't have English as their first language or people with learning difficulties, or who are partially sighted or deaf etc.
- People often need to hear messages more than once and in different ways to remember and understand what they need to do.
- Think about how you can reinforce information and guidance and check that people have understood it and are following it.

Information and guidance for people who aren't your employees:
- There will be information and guidance on how to work safely that you need to share with people who are not your employees, for example delivery drivers, customers, contractors or people you share workplaces with. You will need to work out how you can pass on and share relevant information and guidance for these people, for example on how they socially distance, where they wash their hands, and the arrangements for using welfare facilities.
- As well as sharing information and guidance with others who are not your employees, you may also need to get information and guidance from others you work with. For example, before visiting a site confirm what your delivery drivers need to do to work safely when they arrive.
- If you are asking others for information and guidance about what your workers need to do when they visit, then decide how you will get that information to your workers beforehand.

Updating information and guidance:
- Over time, it is likely that you will have to adapt and change your plans for working safely during the coronavirus outbreak. You need to make sure you have measures in place to update people as they are adapted and changed. Decide if these are enough to update people or if you need to do more. You may find that if there are urgent changes to information and guidance, you need a quicker way of telling people.

Questions to help plan how you will share information and guidance:
- What information and guidance do workers need to make sure they understand how to work safely during the outbreak?
- Think about the plans we are putting in place to carry on working safely and what information needs passing on and how.
- Who else do we need to share information and guidance with and how?

- Think about people who are not employees such as customers, clients and contractors.
- How will people know when information and guidance is updated?
- Think about what is already in place to update people and what else we may need to do.
- Think about what you can do yourself, and what else could be done by your line manager and your organisation.
- Online resources can be used to help support workers, including resources to look after their mental health.
- Talk about how people can continue to have conversations on concerns when they are working so they know they will be listened to and that, if necessary, action will be taken to change plans.
- If people are in the shielded or clinically vulnerable categories, explain what will be done to protect them, e.g. working from home, doing tasks where social distancing can be followed. This also applies for people who are living with someone in the shielded or clinically vulnerable group.

Supporting Employees

Restructuring work and working from home:
- Agree on the jobs that can be done from home.
- Think about tasks that could be done in another way that means you don't need to go into work, e.g. customer consultations online, checking in with sites virtually, talking to managers about work that needs to be done using email, phone and conferencing.
- Agree what work equipment will be provided for people working remotely.
- Think about how you will keep in touch with people working remotely, to make sure they feel part of the team and involved.

Questions to help plan how you will support employees:
- What are your main concerns about returning to work?
- What are your specific concerns and what can we put in place to reassure you?
- How can work be restructured to allow more people to work from home or remotely? Think about the tasks you do in your workplace and whether they need to be done in work or if they can be done another way or from home.
- What do we need to do if there is a suspected case of coronavirus in our work?
- Think about how people will understand and follow the guidelines for when to self-isolate and what you will do if someone is at work and has symptoms. What support will be needed for the affected person and others they work with?
- What could be put in place to help with any of the issues you have talked about?

- Think about what you can do yourself, and what else could be done by your line manager and your business or organisation.

'Working Through This Together'

This guide has been endorsed by Engagement Forum on Covid-19, comprising: Confederation of British Industry, Chambers of Commerce, Federation of Small Businesses NI, Institute of Directors, Manufacturing NI, NI Retail Consortium, the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, SOLACE, the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland (HSENI), the Labour Relations Agency and the Public Health Agency.

Key Principles

- Employers will continue to fulfil their legal duties under existing health and safety law to maintain and protect the physical and mental health, safety and welfare of their employees and customers. Where an employer cannot provide a safe working environment during the current emergency, they must determine what steps are required to create a safe working environment, taking all reasonably practicable measures to implement a safe working environment. If all appropriate actions have been taken and having sought advice from HSENI or similar authority, the employer still cannot provide a safe working environment, the employer must close. Employers, where appropriate, should then seek to 'furlough' employees using the Government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. HMRC will ultimately decide on the eligibility of such claims.
- Employees have a legal responsibility to their employer and each other to follow instructions regarding safe working practices.
- Everyone should approach the health, safety and wellbeing of each other in the workplace with compassion and understanding.
- Employers are advised to have regular and meaningful engagement with their employees and/or their recognised trade union or other representatives (including their health and safety committee, where this exists) about the Covid-19 emergency. These engagements provide additional opportunities to remind everyone about safe working practices, necessary precautions, and to share concerns.
- It is recommended that larger workplaces have a standing group (comprising management and union/employee representatives) to meet regularly, adhering to social distancing guidelines (see below) if the meeting cannot be held virtually, to anticipate issues that might arise during the crisis. Owners/managers in smaller workplaces should have similar regular discussions with employees.
- Employers are advised to circulate safety messages regularly to all employees using mobile technology, such as WhatsApp groups. The use of posters and

other visual aids around the workplace will also help reinforce safety messages.

- Employers must consult with employees and/or their recognised trade union appointed health and safety representative, or other representatives, on the required steps to keep the workplace safe from the virus.
- Employers and employees and/or their recognised trade union or other representatives have a shared responsibility to work together to resolve concerns about safety in the workplace. See 'What to Do When Concerns Arise' (below) if the matter cannot be resolved.

Public Health Guidelines

Employees with suspected symptoms of Covid-19:
- Employers will ensure that all employees are aware of the symptoms of the virus; we recommend that you refer to Public Health Agency information. Employers are encouraged to keep themselves and their employees informed of updates to public health guidance.
- Employees who have symptoms of the virus must let their employer know immediately, follow public health advice and stay at home.
- If the symptoms come on while at work, go home immediately. Where possible, an 'isolation room' should be designated if the employee cannot leave immediately – this must be cleaned thoroughly afterwards in line with public health advice.
- Employees who are designated as extremely vulnerable, and subject to shielding' are strongly advised to stay at home at all times. They should also avoid any face to face contact. These measures are in place for a period of at least 12 weeks from the day they are informed by the NHS or their GP that they fall into this category.

Hand washing:
- Employers must ensure there are facilities for everyone to wash hands with soap and hot water for at least 20 seconds, and/or hand sanitiser.
- Everyone should wash their hands. When they get home or into work, and while at work after blowing their nose sneezing or coughing, eating or handling food.
- Employers must ensure there are adequate washing facilities and/or hand sanitiser at the workplace, e.g. entrances, rest/breakout rooms, and canteens.

Social distancing:
- Everyone must keep two metres apart, wherever possible. For working practices which necessitate closer working than the recommended public health advice, these will be facilitated with appropriate safety measures, such as PPE or protective screening.

- Floor markings, spaced two metres apart, help everyone to respect social distancing in queues. Install partitions and barriers, such as screens, where possible to improve segregation where social distancing cannot be achieved.

Back to top

Safer Work Practices

Movement:
- Non-essential travel should be avoided. Where travel cannot be avoided, employees should travel alone wherever possible.
- When employees use a vehicle with others, try to travel with the same person, preferably with one in the front and one in the back of the vehicle and ensure good ventilation.
- Practice social distancing when using car parks. For employers' own car parks, consideration should be given to leasing additional car parking spaces, where available, to help create space for social distancing.
- If employees have no alternative but to use to use public transport to travel to work, they should be advised to observe social distancing.
- Employers must consider ways of ensuring that all movement around the premises and between sites supports social distancing.
- Recommended measures include, one person at a time in lifts, and making entrances, corridors, stairways and aisles 'one-way' to prevent the risk of congestion.

Work processes:
- Employers will, where appropriate, stagger start/finish times, shift patterns, and lunch, tea and smoking breaks to reduce the number of employees in an area or using entrances/corridors at any given time.
- Employers will, where appropriate, reconfigure production lines and processes, and common areas such as reception, canteens, changing rooms and smoking shelters, to create space for social distancing.
- Employers will, where appropriate, keep the same team rosters every day to minimise contact with wider groups.

Meetings:
- Are to be conducted by telephone or videoconference, whenever possible. Where physical meetings cannot be avoided, effective social distancing measures must be ensured.

Back to top

Mental Health & Wellbeing

Everyone is naturally concerned about the Virus at this time so additional attention should be directed at mental health issues:

- Employers and line managers are advised to be alert to mood or behavioural changes in employees and talk to them compassionately about problems.
- Employers and Trades Unions will collaborate to promote their existing range of support networks available to employees and members, and where appropriate publicise Employee Assistance Programmes, Union Support Schemes and other government and third sector Mental Wellbeing resources.
- Employers should signpost online training aids to promote mental health and wellbeing.

What to do when concerns arise:

- Employees are encouraged to raise any concerns they have with their employer, through their line manager, recognised trade union or other employee representative body if in place. Constructive dialogue is advised for the resolution of these concerns.
- Employees have the absolute right to work in an environment free from serious or imminent danger or harm and should not suffer detriment or dismissal for acting on a reasonable belief of serious or imminent danger.
- Employees are often better placed to put ideas forward on how to resolve concerns. This can be achieved through early dialogue and consultation. Where normal consultative arrangements do not resolve the issues, employees are entitled to raise a grievance.
- If agreement on a resolution cannot be reached, employees and/or their recognised trade union or other representatives should contact the HSENI on 0800 0320 121 to obtain advice or make a complaint. Appropriate enforcement action will be considered as necessary.
- An employee who suffers disadvantage or dismissal because they reasonably and genuinely believed their employer was not complying with their legal obligations has legal protection; as per the existing legislative framework.
- Employers should use their disciplinary procedures to deal with serious or repeated breaches of health and safety practices.

Back to top

Links to Useful Documents

Here is a range of documents with further resources for preparing your workplace, whether it's an office, a contact centre, a helpline, for the safe return to work after the lock down (as with all the links in this document, access them by hovering over them and pressing *Click* or pressing *Control-Click*):

Pre-Return to work Declaration
Hygiene checklist
Offices/Contact centres
Management Risk Assessment

Management Risk Assessment Mobile Workers
Management S49 Guide

Posters

Here are some posters you can download for display in your workplace:

- Social distancing poster
- Wash your hands poster
- Isolate your household poster

References

https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/covid-19-coronavirus/guidance-professionals-and-organisations

https://www.lra.org.uk/resources/covid-19-working-through-it-together-practical-guide-making-workplaces-safer

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings

https://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/risk/index.htm
https://www.hse.gov.uk/news/assets/docs/working-safely-guide.pdf

https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/covid-19/adapting-to-covid/covid-19-video-consultations-and-homeworking

https://www.rcgp.org.uk/about-us/rcgp-blog/covid-19-guide-to-setting-up-an-isolation-room.aspx

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