

COVID-19: Return to Work Arrangements

The gradual resumption of essential staff returning to offices in the UK was undoubtedly set back following government guidelines issued in late September that again encouraged people to work from home where possible. Similar patterns have played out across much of Europe. The current increase in coronavirus cases will likely delay the return to the workplace for many until early 2021 but will undoubtedly resurface, albeit months after originally planned.

In light of this situation, we have updated and reissued some of our return to work guidelines, originally published in May 2020. These are based on current UK government advice and could help inform your future risk assessments. All organisations should evaluate their own workspace requirements and add site specific controls. When conducting a risk assessment, decisions should be discussed with senior management, health and safety advisors, employee representatives (Trade Unions and other professional bodies represented in the workplace), HR and the premises' Facilities Management. Additionally, it may be necessary to review and update contracts and arrangements with third parties such as Facilities Management, cleaning and catering companies in light of the changing requirements.

The guidance provided in this document is taken from the [RiskPal](#) risk assessment platform and is subject to regular updates. For more information or to access request access to RiskPal, please contact info@riskpal.co.uk

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Are any staff at a heightened risk of infection from COVID-19?

Staff may be required to complete a health declaration or obtain authorisation before returning to the workplace.

Vulnerable individuals may be required to complete a risk assessment in coordination with Occupational Health, Health & Safety or management. Staff should consider the following points before returning to work:

- Are you aged 65 or over?
- Do you have any medical risk factors or health conditions (be they historical or ongoing) that could result in an infection being severe or life threatening? Such conditions include (but are not limited to) those who suffer from immunosuppression, respiratory issues like asthma and cystic fibrosis, diabetes, heart/lung/kidney disease, high blood pressure, obesity and cancer.
- Have you received a notification from the NHS that you must 'shelter in place'?
- Are you pregnant?
- Do you have vulnerable dependents at home or close by?
- Additional information can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19#definition>

A company policy/guidelines should be communicated to all parties regarding:

- Working from home if feeling symptomatic.
- Individuals who have household members with underlying health conditions.
- Individuals who have dependents living elsewhere who rely upon them for support and care.
- Individuals with household members who are sick and/or required to isolate/quarantine themselves
- Informing workers if they have been exposed to an infected individual in the workplace - requiring them to quarantine for the required amount of time.
- Sick leave, the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and any other policies regarding the issues detailed above.
- Consider sharing all / elements of your Return to Work / office risk assessment.

In addition:

- Maintain an open door policy for individuals to discuss their situation with your health and safety team /Occupational Health / HR / management.
- Work from home should be extended for all vulnerable staff.
- Staff should review their journey to/from work. Try and avoid using public transport if possible, particularly during peak travel times.

Do staff know what to expect on return to work?

It is advisable to inform all staff of the following safety information and guidelines in advance of returning to the workplace:

- Gradual reopening of the workplace will include social/physical distancing measures, which will affect the pace of return.
 - Do not come in to work if you are sick.
 - Avoid coming into work if you live with or are involved with the care of a vulnerable person.
 - If possible try and take your temperature before work - and stay at home if your temperature is at or over 37.8° C.
 - If feeling unwell, inform your manager immediately. Ensure you go home in the safest way possible.
 - Continue current arrangements until formally notified of return.
 - A short site induction before the first day back is a good idea. This may be conducted by email/phone/conference call.
 - Maintain personal hygiene at all times.
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Have work buildings been correctly and adequately maintained during the lockdown period?

Many buildings have been empty or unoccupied during the COVID-19 lockdown. Before staff or tenants return to their workplace, landlords, building/facilities management and owners of buildings should check that adequate maintenance has been carried out, such as:

- Check that the general structure of the building remains in good order.
 - Check the status of the water system to ensure any build-up of Legionnaires bacteria is treated and flushed.
 - Conduct visual checks of mould or other invasive agents, including insects and rodents.
 - Carry out a thorough deep clean to remove dust and other contaminants such as allergens.
 - Check for water damage caused by weather or plumbing faults.
 - Vent little used spaces, drains and pipes.
 - All mechanical systems and internal spaces should be thoroughly cleaned
 - Check the operation of all taps, security doors, toilets, light switches and fire/smoke alarms. If not qualified to do so, ensure the relevant technician is contacted in advance to do so.
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Is there a general risk of cross contamination / infection in the workplace?

If a minimum safe distance of 1-2 metres can be maintained throughout the workplace at all times, medical personal protective equipment (PPE) is not required (this distance depends upon your government's health and safety advice and/or specific local measures).

Safety control measures

- Sufficient key duty holders (e.g. fire wardens, first aid) should be in place and fully briefed before the introduction of other employees.
- Ensure a controlled and carefully phased return to organisation buildings to help minimise potential for cross contamination/infection.
- Ensure the building is properly and thoroughly cleaned before reopening.
- Check with engineering/maintenance that ventilation is working in all areas.
- A short site induction before the first day back is a good idea. This may be conducted by email/phone/conference call and should be accessible to all staff.
- Ensure all entry and exit points from the workplace are not congested and a safe minimum safe distance of at least 1-2 metres can be maintained at all times (this distance depends upon your government's health and safety advice and/or specific local measures).
- Instigate additional cleaning protocols for common touch points throughout the building, including (but not limited to) turnstiles, doors, handrails, bannisters, lift buttons, and handles etc.
- All work stations/areas should be regularly cleaned and disinfected (an absolute minimum of twice daily is advisable).
- Tell staff not to come to work if feeling ill or experiencing a temperature over 37.8° C.
- Consider non-invasive electronic temperature control at entry points for all personnel, and exclude individuals with temperatures over 37.8° C (for example a 'no contact infrared forehead scanner'). A protocol will be required in conjunction with the health and safety team and HR to ensure privacy.
- Where possible and safe to do so, fix doors open to minimise contact. Note that additional security may be required when doing so. Check this does not compromise any fire safety regulations and arrangements.
- Staff should be informed to use their arm or shoulder to push doors open instead of their hands.
- Provide, promote and ensure regular handwashing with hot water & soap is adhered to by all staff throughout the day. Non-touch hand dryers or single use paper towels should be provided.
- Supply easy access to suitable hand sanitiser and ensure stocks are maintained. Sanitiser should be alcohol-based with greater than 60% ethanol or 70% isopropanol content
- Monitor building traffic flow and identify potential hot-spots for congestion.
- Where busy communal areas are identified, instigate one-way flow systems or restrict access.
- Provide physical markers to identify the safe minimum 1-2 metres distance in busier areas of the building (this distance depends upon your government's health and safety advice and/or specific local measures).

- Whenever possible, meetings and presentations should be carried out remotely using digital platforms. Where this is not possible, a 1-2 metre distance should be adhered to between those attending and face masks worn.
 - Stagger lunch and other breaks to minimise congestion.
 - Self-service catering hubs are a potential hot-spot for hard surface contamination. Increase the frequency of cleaning and enforce hand washing, or the use of hand sanitiser by self-dispensing areas. Please also refer to the **“Is catering provided and/or required for staff on site?”** question and advice.
 - Desks/chairs should be at least 1-2 metres apart (this distance depends upon your government's health and safety advice and/or specific local measures), and have wide enough spaces between to move around. This may mean only a percentage of desks can be used. Consider installing protective screens between desks if necessary.
 - Wherever possible people should work side by side or back to back rather than facing each other.
 - Desks and keyboards/IT accessories should be subject to regular cleaning (especially between users if hot desking cannot be avoided). Computer wipes (greater than 70% alcohol content) should be available at all times, and staff requested to wipe down hard surfaces at the start and end of shifts. Used wipes can be placed in open bins as alcohol evaporates quickly.
 - Ensure toilets are easily accessible – outside doors may be propped open in some layouts.
 - Wash hands after handling all post / deliveries.
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Are measures in place if an employee tests positive for COVID-19 whilst at work?

- Be aware that infected staff may be ill, but could also feel well and not show any symptoms (asymptomatic). Note that test results are not 100% accurate.
- It is good practice to purchase and maintain a selection of emergency medical personal protective equipment (PPE) , which should be held by a designated person. Such items include N95 / FFP2 or FFP3 rated face masks, disposable gloves and antiviral hand gels.
- Treat the situation sympathetically and avoid any general panic.
- Infected employees should follow the ‘stay at home guidance’ and avoid public transport. If the infected person is on site when they confirm the infection, ensure a detailed plan of action is in place to isolate the person immediately. Use a pre-vetted taxi service with a separate passenger cab (e.g. black cab), or ask a family member to collect the individual.
- If the staff member is experiencing breathing difficulties or other serious symptoms, call the emergency services for help. Tell them the patient has a positive test result. In the UK, visit [NHS 111](https://www.nhs.uk) online or call 111. Only dial 999 if they are seriously ill.
- If practical, isolate the employee in a safe space while waiting for collection, providing constant reassurance from a safe distance.
- Staff who have or could have been in contact with the individual should be traced, where possible, and be notified of the situation - **without relaying the infected employee’s name.** With their permission, inform work colleagues.

- Staff should self-isolate at home for at least 7 days immediately. Exact periods of self-isolation will vary by country. Affected staff can take work equipment home after routine cleaning.
 - Cleaners with the appropriate PPE and cleaning equipment should commence a deep clean of all areas affected by the infected staff immediately.
 - World Health Organisation advice suggests that human coronaviruses can survive on hard surfaces for up to 72 hours, less than 4 hours on copper and less than 24 hours on cardboard. The virus can be killed using common household disinfectants and effective handwashing.
<https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses>
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Are elevators/lifts/stairs used in your building?

If the elevators / lifts / stairs are shared – discuss the following points with the relevant responsible people from each floor to decide what is practical and achievable:

- Most lifts do not allow for the recommended safe minimum 1-2 metres distance so should be avoided unless only one person needs to travel. Note that others may enter the lift before it gets to the floor you selected.
 - Lifts should be prioritised for staff with disabilities (note that disabilities may be hidden).
 - A marked queuing system should be put in place, including a safe space to exit the lift without coming into close contact with the queuing staff.
 - The location of stairs should be indicated (if it is not obvious) and a one way system put in place.
 - Doors onto stairs should be fixed open, where possible and safe to do so, noting all relevant fire safety regulations are still adhered to.
 - Advise staff to use their arm or shoulder to push doors open instead of using their hands.
 - Staff should always thoroughly and properly cleanse their hands on return to their desk/workspace.
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Do staff share equipment such as IT, cameras, phones and vehicles?

- Personal issue work equipment (laptops, keyboards, mice, headsets, mobile phones etc) should not be shared and should be regularly cleaned using alcohol wipes which have a minimum alcohol content of 70%. Any wipes used should be certified as effective at destroying viruses.
- Maintain supplies of suitable and appropriate cleaning products, and ensure these are available to all relevant staff.
- It is advisable to avoid using mobile phones and tablets/laptops in congested areas on the way to work (e.g. on public transport).
- Mobile phones and all IT equipment should be cleaned before starting work and at regular intervals throughout the day. Always thoroughly wash hands after cleaning. Communicate a written cleaning protocol with detailed guidance on best practice to avoid cross contamination.
- Cameras and shared equipment such as office printers should be cleaned and used in rotation.

- Keep a log book for shared equipment to record names of users and personnel responsible for carrying out the cleaning process - in case contact tracing is required. Thoroughly wash hands after any cleaning.
 - If using shared technical vehicles – instigate a cleaning regime of hard surfaces between drivers and keep a written record. Areas to focus on include the steering wheel, hand brake, gear lever, door handles, seat belts, head rests, window winders/buttons, light switches etc etc).
 - Whenever possible, utilise all space by locating passengers around the vehicle to provide greatest distance. Consider driving with the windows down to ensure good air flow at all times.
 - If the minimum safe distance of 1-2 metres cannot be achieved in a vehicle, and the team consents to travel together, N95 / or FFP2 or FFP3 rated face masks and gloves should be used, and guidance on their safe use given.
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Are you providing refreshments on site for staff?

Self-service refreshment hubs are often confined to a small and/or restricted space, and are therefore a potential hot-spot for hard surface contamination, cross contamination and social interactions.

- Set guidelines and rules for use, paying particular attention to capacity (for example ‘one out = one in’).
 - Inform all staff of the new arrangements by email and signage, and monitor compliance on a routine basis.
 - Request that staff do not make or carry drinks for each other during this period.
 - Increase the frequency of cleaning. Provide and enforce the use of hand sanitiser by self-dispensing areas (sanitiser should be alcohol-based with greater than 60% ethanol or 70% isopropanol)
 - Consider asking all staff to leave their cups/glasses/plates/bowls/cutlery etc on desks after use for collection by cleaning personnel, who will use gloves to load items into a dishwasher, or for a hot water wash with detergent. If proper washing facilities cannot be provided, disposable items should be provided and permitted only.
 - Cleaning personnel should have clean hands when placing items back into the cupboard/draw/place of storage.
 - Staff should be permitted and encouraged to bring their own cups/plates/bowls/cutlery etc into the office and take them home to wash.
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Is catering provided and/or required for staff on site?

Discuss with the contractors or managers responsible for providing catering if the kitchen and food storage areas can be used with social distancing in place. This may be an area where further controls and the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) is required.

Risk assessments for cleaning & catering staff/contractors should be updated to include COVID-19 controls.

If catering can be provided safely, the following safety control measures should be considered:

- Ensure a thorough cleaning regime is adhered to and maintained throughout the entire catering and eating areas/spaces. Once vacated, all tables should be cleared and cleaned by staff before the next person/s sit down.
- Stagger meal times to control/minimise usage during peak periods.
- Staff must always thoroughly and properly wash hands with hot water and soap before accessing catering areas, and routinely throughout their shifts.
- Set out catering areas to ensure queues and seating can maintain physical/social distance, and provide a physical indication of the minimum safe 1-2 metres distance e.g. floor markings (this distance depends upon your government's health and safety advice and/or specific local measures).
- Ensure access routes can also maintain the recommended 1-2 metres distance. If not, set up a one-way flow system.
- Catering staff must ensure they have clean hands at all times by using disposable gloves and adhering to a strict hand washing routine. Staff must not touch their faces or hair whilst wearing gloves. All jewelry should be removed.
- Food preparation and service staff should wear clean clothes for each shift.
- Staff should not work if they are ill or if they have a temperature (above 37.8 C).
- Plates, bowls, cups, glasses and cutlery should all be washed in a dishwasher using a hot cycle with detergent. If staff cannot wash these items in a dishwasher (or with hot water and washing liquid detergent), disposable single use items should be used instead.
- All cutlery should be removed from shared communal areas, and instead be given out with the meal. If staff cannot wash cutlery with hot water and detergent, then only disposable cutlery should be provided.
- Consider removing shared items like sauces or condiments from communal areas, and providing single use sachets on request.
- Designate areas to deposit used items for collection by catering staff, and ensure this area does not become congested.
- Vending machines should be stocked using clean disposable gloves. Vending machine surfaces should be regularly cleaned and disinfected.
- Packaging of takeaway items (including vending) should be removed and then hands washed before consumption. Hands should again be washed after disposal of packaging.

Will a visitor reception be in operation?

Additional safety measures should be implemented in areas where maintaining a minimum safe distance of 1-2 metres is not possible. Though the following safety guidance is considered good practice, it may not be achievable in all workplaces. Some measures, such as temperature checks on visitors should be approved with the health and safety team and HR in advance.

- Try and minimise visitors by using telephone and online meetings wherever possible.
- Installing cleanable protective screens at till or reception points can help protect staff.
- Consider the use of face visors and gloves for front line staff who are in contact with the general public (e.g. security personnel and reception desk staff).
- Ensure a visitors log is completed by reception/security staff, including contact details (i.e. mobile phone number) - in case contact tracing is required.
- Establish a structured 1-2 metres queuing system using physical markers (this distance depends upon your government's health and safety advice and/or specific local measures).
- Display site rules clearly and brief visitors on arrival regarding safety and hygiene arrangements.
- Visitor passes should be a lanyard style hands free with a wipe clean surface.
- Consider checking all visitor's temperatures before entry, including staff/contractors. Do not permit the visitor to enter the workplace if they have a temperature.
- Establish a clear and well ventilated open space for visitors to meet staff where practicable.
- Visitors who need to enter the building should be asked to maintain a minimum safe distance of 1-2 metres from others at all times.
- Screens and all hard surfaces in the reception area should be routinely cleaned and a log kept by cleaning staff.
- If queuing is required outside of the building, mark minimum safe distances and consider providing additional security to manage the queue and deter any potential criminal activity. This is also an opportunity to inform people entering of the site rules.

Will post and other deliveries be received at the building?

The following safety guidance is considered good practice, though it may not be achievable in all workplaces.

- Deliveries should be directed to the post room, where established security procedures should be in place.
- Post room personnel should maintain a minimum safe distance of 1-2 metres at all times. Consider staggered work times and physical markings to help achieve this. Screens may need to be installed at the point of contact with staff.
- Post deposited by staff at collection points should be handled wearing gloves.

- Staff should avoid touching their faces, and wash their hands thoroughly and properly using hot water and soap immediately after removing gloves.
 - Post room staff working on the floor can use their trolley as a physical estimation of the recommended 1-2 metres safe distance.
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Will your arrangements for fire safety, emergency response, security and maintenance be substantially altered by the new Covid-19 measures in the premises?

A building could experience various emergency situations including fire, bomb threat, terrorist activity or other building failures. Ensuring robust fire, security and maintenance arrangements are in place will help minimise the likelihood and impact of these events.

- Allow a period to confirm the building maintenance and fire arrangements remain effective.
- Work with your Facilities Management Team / Landlord to implement new procedures, as outlined in your risk assessment. Test established evacuation procedures – the risk of immediate harm should always take precedence over the theoretical risk of virus spread. Note that in such emergency situations the minimum safe distance of 1-2 metres is unlikely to be maintained.
- Fire wardens and other duty holders should be briefed in advance of any changes to their established procedures.
- If attending the assembly/muster points, efforts should be made to reinstate the minimum safe 1-2 metres distancing (this distance depends upon your government's health and safety advice and/or specific local measures).
- For an interim period, cancel any planned/scheduled fire evacuation tests that would empty the building onto the streets.
- Make additional efforts to avoid any false alarms on the fire system – for example remove toasters/ovens or other sources of smoke.
- Brief staff on the importance of avoiding false alarms – but ensure they will act correctly in the event of a fire or emergency alarm.
- After the all clear, allow staff to return to their work stations in an orderly fashion, ensuring 1-2 metres physical distancing is maintained when doing so.
- Update the visitor logbook to include contact details (i.e. mobile phone numbers) in case contact tracing is required.
- Check buildings and surrounds for any unauthorised activity, paying particular attention to access/exit points such as doors, windows, parking lots and the roof.
- Ensure contractors risk assessment include related COVID-19 safety controls. Managers of 'Permit to Work' (PTW) protocols should take this into consideration when booking and authorising work, especially works with naked flames.
- Brief all contractors before they access the site on the arrangements you have in place, and establish that their work will not compromise your staff safety. This may mean temporarily cleaning and isolating areas to ensure the minimum safe distances of 1-2 metres is realised.

Are you travelling to work during the COVID-19 pandemic?

- Staff should try and avoid using public transport if possible, especially during peak travel periods. Note that maintaining the minimum safe distance of 1-2 metres will remain challenging, even during quieter travel times.
 - Management should consider staggering the start and finish of the working day to avoid peak travel periods, and to help manage the volume of people in the building at any one time.
 - The compulsory use of face coverings/masks when travelling by public transport depends on the relevant government advice.
 - Encourage staff to cycle to work if feasible, and ensure secure facilities are provided for bikes.
 - Consider making additional car parking available and discuss meeting the additional costs of public car parks/congestion charges.
 - Discuss with staff the importance of cleaning their vehicles on a routine basis, of note the steering wheel, gear lever, hand brake, door handles, seat belts, keys, head rests etc.
 - If face coverings are worn they should only be used once before being placed into a sealed bag for washing at a high temperature with detergent.
 - Hands should be thoroughly and properly washed with hot water and soap for at least 20 seconds immediately after any gloves have been removed.
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Will individuals be working in a confined space, such as an editing suite, PCR (production control room) or recording studio?

Coronavirus transmission occurs by breathing in droplets from an infected individual, as well as by touching a contaminated surface and then touching the face (of note the eyes, mouth and nostrils). Those working in close proximity to one another are therefore at an elevated risk of becoming infected. Safety measures should therefore be implemented and enforced across all confined work spaces.

- If practical, non-essential staff should continue to work remotely to help reduce the number of people in the workplace. Regularly monitor and review who needs to work in confined areas of the workplace.
- Monitor individuals working in a confined space for any signs of illness before entering, particularly for any sign of a higher than normal temperature. Individuals should ensure they wash their hands [regularly and thoroughly](#) before entering a confined space. Install hand sanitiser stations (with a minimum alcohol content of 60%) at strategic locations to help facilitate this.
- A distance of 1-2 metres or more should be adhered to in all confined areas (this depends upon your government's health and safety advice and/or specific local measures). If this is not feasible, consider using face coverings / face masks whilst in such areas. Any used facemasks

should be disposed of in a sealed bag and placed into a closed bin, and hands thoroughly washed afterwards

- Check if there is sufficient airflow through all confined workspaces. If air conditioning is in operation, regularly check with the maintenance team regarding its effectiveness, and ensure that any filters are being changed on a regular basis
 - Consider the practicalities of redesigning workspaces/workstations to help maintain physical distancing of 1-2 metres or more (this depends upon your government's health and safety advice and/or specific local measures). Perspex screens could be installed to help separate workstations and provide a degree of protection from somebody coughing or sneezing. If feasible, adapt confined spaces so that individuals work side-by-side or with their backs to each other (rather than facing each other)
 - Install a one-way traffic flow in, around and out of the confined space, with adequate signage to inform people
 - Encourage individuals to not wear jewellery and to tie up long hair. Doing so should help reduce the spread of any virus droplets
 - All workstations and surfaces in a confined area should be regularly and thoroughly cleaned/disinfected, especially between each user, including all common touch points like table surfaces, seats, keyboards, handles of equipment etc
 - Put up information posters informing individuals on how to reduce the risk of virus transmission, focussing upon the regular and thorough washing of hands, sneezing/coughing into a tissue and disposing of it, as well as staying at home if they feel sick.
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