Employers Guide for Employees Returning to Work

RMS Covid-19

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Introduction

As part of our commitment to support our clients during the global outbreak of Covid-19, we have put together this document to provide practical information, checklist and advice to guide you through some of the most common risk factors and measures you can take to mitigate the risk from exposure to Covid-19.

The guidance will help your business to remain compliant with health and safety legislation in your workplace and hopefully ease any anxiety your employees might have when they begin to return to work. Naturally, this guidance will need to be adapted to suit your own individual circumstances.

It should be noted that certain professions that have a greater exposure to the virus are health care workers in acute care hospitals, rehabilitation hospitals, mental health hospitals, long term care facilities, emergency departments, and others who work close to their clients or patients including care homes, residential and nursing homes.

Therefore sector specific guidance should be sought from either your industry body, trade association or Public Health England.

Naturally the situation concerning Covid-19 and the advice issued by the UK Government is constantly changing, and therefore we advise you to check the relevant websites listed within this document for the latest sector specific advice relevant to your industry.

If you need any further support or advice on any aspect of risk management then you should speak to your health and safety consultant.

Covid-19

Coronaviruses are a group of viruses belonging to the family of Coronaviridae, which infect both animals and humans.

Human coronaviruses can cause mild disease similar to a common cold, while others cause more severe disease (such as MERS - Middle East Respiratory Syndrome and SARS – Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome). A new coronavirus that previously has not been identified in humans emerged in Wuhan, China in December 2019 and commonly referred to Covid-19.

Signs and symptoms include respiratory symptoms and include fever, cough and shortness of breath. In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome and sometimes death. Standard recommendations to prevent the spread of COVID-19 include frequent cleaning of hands using alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water; covering the nose and mouth with a flexed elbow or disposable tissue when coughing and sneezing; and avoiding close contact with anyone that has a fever and cough and social distancing.

How COVID-19 spreads in the workplace

When someone who has COVID-19 coughs or exhales they release droplets of infected fluid. Most of these droplets fall on nearby surfaces and objects - such as desks, tables or telephones or common touch points such as door handles.

Employees could catch COVID-19 by touching contaminated surfaces or objects – and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth.

If they are standing within one meter of a person with COVID-19 they can catch it by breathing in droplets coughed out or exhaled by them and in particular enclosed spaces such as lifts are at more risk. In other words, COVID-19 spreads in a similar way to flu.

Most persons infected with COVID-19 experience mild symptoms and recover. However, some go on to experience more serious illness and may require hospital care. Risk of serious illness rises with age: people over 40 seem to be more vulnerable than those under 40. People with weakened immune systems and people with conditions such as diabetes, heart and lung disease are also more vulnerable to serious illness.

Employers Considerations:

Employers have a vital role to play in preventing the spread of coronavirus and reducing the risk of employees being exposed to coronavirus. In an effort to mitigate the spread of the disease, you should consider modifying working patterns, including encouraging staff to work from home where possible.

During a worldwide emergency like this, many employees can feel anxious and concerned about their health, safety and wellbeing. It is important that you communicate with your staff in order to allay these concerns to the best of their ability.

- Being clear to workers who feel unwell that they should not be coming into the workplace.

- Ensure you keep employees informed of the latest Government advice

- Exploring how your organisation will continue to function if workers, contractors and suppliers cannot come to your place of business

- Developing plans for different working shifts so that staff overlap is kept at a minimum

- Implementing split site or location operations where feasible

- Finding ways of planning and modifying processes in the event that large portions of the workforce are absent for a period of time.

Personal hygiene is also an important preventative measure to curtail the spread of the disease. Employers have a duty of care to their workforce and should ensure workers have access to appropriate hygiene facilities such hot water, soap, hand sanitiser and bins to dispose of used tissues.

Emergency planning advice:
We recommend that businesses follow good practice in emergency planning, preparedness and response. This can be achieved by adopting the following steps:

- Being clear to workers who feel unwell that they should not be coming into the workplace.

- Ensure you keep employees informed of the latest Government advice

- Exploring how your organisation will continue to function if workers, contractors and suppliers cannot come to your place of business

- Developing plans for different working shifts so that staff overlap is kept at a minimum

- Implementing split site or location operations where feasible

- Finding ways of planning and modifying processes in the event that large portions of the workforce are absent for a period of time.

Practical measures to be considered in the workplace:

It should be recognised that it is not possible to plan and prepare guidance for every individual place of work and circumstances concerning the latest guidance on Covid-19 and social distancing and how it can be applied in the workplace.

Listed below are considerations that you should take into account dependant on individual circumstances and latest Government guidance for the workplace including sector specific guidance.

Work Practices

Identify whether some or all work can be carried out remotely to reduce or limit the number of employees who are required to work in the premises. Where a physical presence in an office or workplace is required, consider whether a rota system can be utilised to keep groups together. Put in place simple and straightforward arrangements to make sure that those working at home can do so safely and consider what equipment they may need.

Prepare your employees so that you have up-to-date emergency contact details, and they can switch to home working overnight if the situation changes. Identify where closure of local services such as schools will deplete your available resources.

Consider staffing levels and staff with specific responsibilities such as first aiders and fire marshals, do you still have adequate cover. Do you need to up-date any notices.

Travel

Minimise travel where possible and use online conferencing facilities if it is an option. Identify any work that requires foreign travel and keep up-to-date with Foreign and Commonwealth Office (CFO) guidance on international travel from the UK and to specific countries.

Social Distancing (if still in place):

Employees should be mindful of the social distancing rules at all times including using toilets and other communal areas and the manager should undertake daily briefings to staff members.

Plan all work to minimise contact between workers, although be mindful of any additional manual handling implications and use lifting aids wherever possible.

Non-essential physical work that requires close contact between workers should not be carried out as far as possible and work requiring skin to skin contact should not be carried out on site as far as possible.

Where it is not possible to remain 2 metres apart, staff should work side by side, or facing away from each other, rather than face to face if possible, where face-to-face contact is essential, this should be kept to 15 minutes or less wherever possible as much as possible.

Staff should not be encouraged to visit shops or any other premises whilst at work and always maintain 2 meters.

Employee Controls

All non-critical employees should work at home wherever possible and only employees who are not displaying any symptoms of Covid-19 or have not been living or sharing a household with persons who may have the symptoms of Covid-19 will be allowed into the Premises to work.

All employees should be reminded to keep their manager fully informed on any medical conditions including any underlying medical conditions which may increase the risk of catching Covid-19 or are displaying any symptoms associated with Covid-19.

All employees need to be made aware of the need to follow Government advice concerning Covid-19 using the Government website and following the links for Covid-19.

Managers

Managers need to be aware that if someone becomes unwell in the workplace with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature, they should be sent home immediately and advised to follow the advice to stay at home from the Government concerning self-isolation.

Any staff members who may be considered vulnerable (as defined by the UK Government) will not be allowed to work in the premises and should follow the procedures as laid down by the Government for Vulnerable persons.

Rest Facilities

Break times may need to be staggered to reduce the amount of people in the canteen / rest area to ensure a distance of 2 meters is maintained and chairs and tables should be positioned at a distance of 2 metres.

Employees should sit 2 metres apart from each other whilst eating and avoid all contact. If possible, mark work areas with floor markings at a distance of 2 metres to help police and enforce the 2 metre rule if still in place.

Staff should be encouraged to bring their own lunch into work which has been prepared at work or brought from a shop and not use the canteen to make lunch except for making drinks.

The workforce should be asked to bring pre-prepared meals and refillable drinking bottles from home Restrict or only allow one member of staff to use the toilet facilities at a time.

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Visitors

Managers will need to consider restricting the number of visitors entering the premises.

At the entrance to the premises there should be a cleaning / hygiene station that should include hand sanitiser, disinfectant wipes, tissues and disposable gloves.

Premises Facilities

You need to consider if the premises have been vacant for a period of time, testing and maintenance of equipment including fire alarm and security systems, start-up procedures for equipment and machinery, if taps have not been run, then these will need to be flushed through for 2 minutes.

You may consider having the premises deep cleaned prior to re-occupation, this may help to relieve any fears by employees returning to work.

Handling post or packages

Staff should continue to follow existing risk assessments and safe systems of working; there are no additional precautions needed for handling post or packages.

Use of Vehicles

If workers have to share enclosed spaces such as the cabs of vehicles, they should keep the window open for ventilation and they should be careful to avoid touching their face at all times.

On leaving the enclosed space, they should wash their hands with soap and water for 20 seconds or more or use hand sanitiser when they cannot wash their hands.

Employees should wash hands or sanitize their hands before and after entering any shared vehicles.

Cleaning

Managers should contact their local cleaning contractors or in-house cleaners to ensure and confirm that they are following the latest guidance from the Government concerning cleaning and disinfectant procedures for non-clinical settings, they may need to increase the frequency of cleaning by contractors.

Additional cleaning of hand contact areas, communal areas including sanitisers and hygiene stations should be cleaned more frequently and at least every four hours.

Public areas including the premises where a symptomatic individual has passed through and spent minimal time, such as corridors and shared communal spaces, but which are not visibly contaminated with body fluids can be cleaned thoroughly as normal.

The Manager should ensure that additional disposable disinfectant wipes are available in the premises for employees
to wipe down any hand contact surfaces or communal surface areas.

Cleaning an area with normal household disinfectant after someone with suspected coronavirus (COVID-19) has left will reduce the risk of passing the infection on to other people.

Hand cleaning facilities or hand sanitiser should be available at the entrance of any room where people eat and should be used by workers when entering and leaving the area.

Manager should ensure plenty supplies of soap, hand sanitisers, disinfectant wipes, tissues, protective gloves and aprons are available for all staff members prior to the start of the shift.

Have in place arrangements to clean your workplace thoroughly if a symptomatic person is identified to have been present for any time.

If staff have to undertake any cleaning in the premises then wherever possible they should wear disposable or washing-up gloves and aprons for cleaning. These should be double-bagged, then stored securely for 72 hours then thrown away in the regular rubbish after cleaning is finished.

Staff who undertake cleaning should use a disposable cloth, first clean hard surfaces with warm soapy water. Then disinfect these surfaces with the cleaning products you normally use.
Pay particular attention to frequently touched areas and surfaces, such as bathrooms, grab-rails in corridors and stairwells and door handles.

If an area has been heavily contaminated, such as with visible bodily fluids, from a person with coronavirus (COVID-19), consider using protection for the eyes, mouth and nose, as well as wearing gloves and an apron, wash hands regularly with soap and water for 20 seconds, and after removing gloves, aprons and other protection used while cleaning.

Waste

Waste from possible cases and cleaning of areas where possible cases have been (including disposable cloths and tissues):

1. Should be put in a plastic rubbish bag and tied when full.

2. The plastic bag should then be placed in a second bin bag and tied.

3. It should be put in a suitable and secure place and marked for storage until the individual's test results are known.

Waste should be stored safely and kept away from children. You should not put your waste in communal waste areas until negative test results are known or the waste has been stored for at least 72 hours.

Laundry

Wash items in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. Use the warmest water setting and dry items completely. Dirty laundry that has been in contact with an unwell person can be washed with other people's items.

Do not shake dirty laundry, this minimises the possibility of dispersing virus through the air.

Clean and disinfect anything used for transporting laundry with your usual products, in line with the cleaning guidance above.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Re-usable PPE should be thoroughly cleaned after use and not shared between workers Single use PPE should be disposed of so that it cannot be reused.

The minimum PPE to be worn for cleaning an area where a person with possible or confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) is disposable gloves and an apron. Hands should be washed with soap and water for 20 seconds after all PPE has been removed.

Employee hygiene standards and protective measures in the premises

Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser (sanitiser with minimum 60% alcohol content) or wash with soap and water for at least 20 seconds after coming into contact with surfaces that may have been contaminated with Covid-19, this may include shared items used by employees such as canteen facilities, toilets and touch points in communal areas such as door handles.

Maintain social distancing- maintain at least 2 meters (6.6 feet distance) between yourself and anyone including members of the public/ visitors at all times where possible. Avoid touching eyes, mouth and nose. Practice respiratory hygiene - Using the nearest waste receptacle to dispose of the tissue after use

If you have fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical care early. Stay home if you feel unwell. If you have a fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical attention and call in advance. Follow the directions of your local health authority.

Stay informed and follow advice given by your healthcare provider. Stay informed on the latest developments about Covid-19. Follow advice given by your healthcare provider, your national and local public health authority or your employer on how to protect yourself and others from Covid-19.

In the UK, the National Health Service (NHS) has advised people to stay at home for 7 days if you have either a high temperature or a new, continuous cough.

If anyone becomes unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature in the business or workplace they should be sent home and advised to follow the stay at home guidance.

The NHS has stated

NHS

- Do **not** go to a GP surgery, pharmacy or hospital.

- You do **not** need to contact 111 to tell them you're staying at home.

Staying at home advice

If a member of staff have symptoms of coronavirus infection (COVID-19), however mild, stay at home and do not leave your house for 7 days from when your symptoms started and ensure you inform the manager.

If you live with others and you are the first in the household to have symptoms of coronavirus, then you must stay at home for 7 days, but all other household members who remain well must stay at home and not leave the house for 14 days. The 14-day period starts from the day when the first person in the house became ill.

What to do if someone develops symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) at work?

If any staff member becomes unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature in the business or workplace they should be sent home and advised to follow the stay at home guidance.

If they need clinical advice, they should go online to NHS 111 or call 111 if they don't have internet access. In an emergency, call 999 if they are seriously ill or injured or their life is at risk. Do not visit the GP, pharmacy, urgent care centre or a hospital.

If a member of staff has helped someone who was taken unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature, they do not need to go home unless they develop symptoms themselves. They should wash their hands thoroughly for 20 seconds after any contact with someone who is unwell with symptoms consistent with coronavirus infection.

Certifying absence from work

We strongly suggest that employers use their discretion around the need for medical evidence for a period of absence where an employee is advised to stay at home due to suspected Covid-19, in accordance with the public health advice being issued by the government.

Use discretion on the need for medical evidence for a period of absence where an employee is advised to self-isolate due to suspected Covid-19 and follow advice provided by the national authorities.

Ensure that sick leave policies are flexible and consistent with public health guidance and that employees are aware of these policies. Talk with companies that provide subcontracted or temporary employees about the importance of sick employees staying home and encourage them to develop non-punitive leave policies.

Not require a healthcare provider's note for employees who are sick with flu-like symptoms to validate their illness or to return to work, as healthcare provider offices and medical facilities may be extremely busy and not able to provide such documentation in a timely way. Employers should maintain flexible policies that permit employees to stay home to care for a sick or dependent family member, as more employees might need to do this than is usual.

If evidence is required by an employer, those with symptoms of coronavirus can get an isolation note from NHS 111 online, and those who live with someone that has symptoms can get a note from the NHS website.

Further Actions, References and Links

Ensure all staff and mangers are made aware of the advice and following the guidance from the Government website following the links for Covid-19. www.Gov.uk

Ensure Managers regular review the guidance from both head office and the UK Recommend a daily staff briefing is undertaken with regards to the risk and precautions concerning Covid-19 in the workplace. Ensure employees who are in a vulnerable group are strongly advised to follow social distancing guidance.

If anyone becomes unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature in the business or workplace they should be sent home and advised to follow the stay at home guidance.

It is not necessary to close the business or workplace or send any staff home, unless government policy changes. Keep monitoring the government response page for the latest details.

Businesses and employers can help reduce the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) by reminding everyone of the public health advice. Posters, leaflets and other materials are available.

For more information visit:

www.smeinsurance.com

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