



COVID-19 Best practice resources: staff working safely

Updated on 17th Jan 2021 – Document under Review

On the above date the advice was applicable to the whole of the UK. Some of the advice is now out of date; and while the document is being reviewed, we encourage you to use the links provided, which lead to regularly updated government and HSE guidance.

This advice is based on government guidance and applies to businesses situated outdoors – market stalls, farms, quarries, commercial forests or other outdoor businesses.

Everyone needs to assess and manage the risks of COVID-19 and employers, have a legal responsibility to protect workers and others from risk to their health and safety. This now includes the risk that is presented by COVID-19. We must do everything we can to reasonably and practically minimise the risk, whilst recognising we cannot completely eliminate the risk of COVID-19.

1. Risk assessment

Your business risk assessment should now address the risks of COVID-19, using the below government informed guidance to support your decisions and control measures. A risk assessment is about identifying sensible measures to control the risks in your workplace. If you have fewer than five workers, or are self-employed, you don't have to write anything down as part of your risk assessment. Your risk assessment will help you decide whether you have done everything you need to. There are [interactive tools](#) available to support you from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

Work as a team to create a safe working environment so that nothing gets missed. If you have a larger team it is advisable to have an elected health and safety representative.

Example [risk assessment 1](#), example [risk assessment 2](#)

2. Managing risk

To help lower the risk of COVID-19 to employees businesses can work through these steps in order

1. Increase frequency of handwashing and surface cleaning
2. Enable work from home
3. Where work cannot be done from home, enable social distancing at work
4. If social distancing cannot happen, business need to consider if the activity needs to continue for the business to operate



5. To mitigate the activity businesses can
 - a. Keep activity as short as possible
 - b. Use screens or barriers to separate people
 - c. Using back-to-back or side-to-side working rather than face-to-face
 - d. Using 'fixed teams or partnering'
6. If people must work face-to-face for a sustained period with more than a small group of fixed partners, then you will need to assess whether the activity can safely go ahead. No one is obliged to work in an unsafe work environment.
7. In your assessment you should have particular regard to whether the people doing the work are especially vulnerable to COVID-19.

3. Who can come to work

Everyone should work from home unless they cannot. If people are coming into work they must be well and not in a vulnerable group. Businesses should consider:

- Planning for the minimum number of people needed to be on site to operate safely and effectively
- Monitoring well-being of on-site staff and staying in touch with off-site staff
- Helping people to work from home who can with the necessary equipment and support for their well-being
- Making sure that the steps you take do not have an unjustifiable negative impact on some groups compared to others
- Who is a high-risk individual and should be self-isolating

4. Movement at work

Government instructs that 2m social distancing must be maintained wherever possible, including while arriving at and departing from work, while in work and in all areas of the workplace including break rooms. To help with this, some of the Government advice includes:

- Staggering arrival/departure times of staff
- Using one-way systems around sites
- Providing hand washing at entry/exit points
- Reducing job and equipment rotation
- Reducing the use of spaces that are small such as corridors, staff rooms etc.

In a static work situation the advice is to change the layout of work to enable people to be socially distanced or to use barriers where layouts cannot be changed. Businesses are encouraged to use consistent pairings for jobs that require you to be close (such as lifting).



For meetings consider using remote meeting software (such as Zoom, Teams, Skype etc). Only meet in person if absolutely necessary, avoid sharing equipment (pens, computers), use a well ventilated room and have signage to help with social distancing (2m spacing markings)

For common areas stagger breaks to reduce congestion, use safe outdoor spaces instead, create more break room space and change the layout to reduce face to face contact and help maintain social distance.

On the farm consider one way systems in barns, packsheds, polytunnels, sheds or other buildings. Consider specific tools being used by specific people to reduce transmission. Can breaks be taken outside or at staggered times? Staff could bring own drinking vessels, lunch or small tools (where practical and applicable).

4. Accidents at work

You do not have to maintain social distance in the case of an accident. Health and safety of the involved persons is the top priority. For those that come into contact take extra care to wash their hands afterwards.

5. Site visits

Where site visits are required

- Site guidance on social distancing and hygiene should be explained to visitors on or before arrival
- Encouraging visits via remote connection/working where this is an option
- Limiting the number of visitors at any one time
- Determining if schedules for essential services and contractor visits can be revised to reduce interaction and overlap between people
- Maintaining a record of all visitors, if this is practical

6. Cleaning

Government requires businesses to make sure that any site or location is clean and safe for staff. It is advised to

- conduct a risk assessment
- follow good cleaning procedures and have good facilities



Cleaning procedures for the workplace

- Frequent cleaning of work areas and equipment between uses, using your usual cleaning products
- Frequent cleaning of objects and surfaces that are touched regularly, such as buckets, hand tools, door handles
- Sanitisation of all hand tools, machinery and equipment after use
- If you are cleaning after a known or suspected case of COVID-19 then you should refer to the [specific guidance](#).

Hygiene facilities

- Providing additional handwashing facilities
- Using signs and posters to build awareness of good handwashing techniques and hygiene
- Providing regular reminders and signage to maintain hygiene standards
- Providing hand sanitisers in multiple locations in addition to washrooms
- Setting clear use and cleaning guidance for toilets to ensure they are kept clean and social distancing is achieved as much as possible
- Enhancing cleaning for busy areas
- Providing more waste facilities and more frequent rubbish collection
- Providing hand drying facilities – either paper towels or electrical dryers

7. Personal Protective Equipment and face coverings

Where you are already using PPE in your work activity to protect against non-COVID-19 risks, you should continue to do so. Workplaces should not encourage the precautionary use of extra PPE to protect against COVID-19 outside clinical settings or when responding to a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19.

Supplies of PPE, including face masks, must continue to be reserved for those who need them to protect against risks in their workplace, such as health and care workers, and those in industrial settings like those exposed to dust hazards.

A face covering can be very simple and may be worn in enclosed spaces where social distancing isn't possible. It just needs to cover your mouth and nose. It is important to know that the evidence of the benefit of using a face covering to protect others is weak and the effect is likely to be small, therefore face coverings are not a replacement for the other ways of managing risk listed above. Wearing a face covering is optional and is not required by law, including in the workplace.



In Northern Ireland it is recommended that you should think about using face coverings in particular circumstances - short periods in enclosed spaces where social distancing is not possible.

8. Managing the workforce

Businesses can change the way work is organised to create distinct groups and reduce the number of contacts each worker has. To do this businesses can

- Fixing teams or shift groups so that where contact is unavoidable, this happens between the same people.
- Identifying areas where people have to directly pass things to each other, such as shared tools or materials and finding ways to remove direct contact, for example, by using drop-off points
- For those workers who are required to travel and stay away from home in onsite accommodation, creating fixed groups of workers so that where contact is unavoidable, this happens between the same people
- Minimising worker congregation at bottlenecks such as entrances, exits and communal areas

Communications

Businesses need to make sure all workers understand COVID-19 related safety procedures including those returning to work after isolating or being furloughed. It is important to make sure all workers on site are kept up to date with how safety measures are being implemented or updated according to the latest government advice. You could

- Have a daily or weekly meeting
- Have clear signage in communal areas
- Text, email or speak with staff about procedures and any changes

9. Inbound and outbound goods

If you regularly receive deliveries or send deliveries out consider making some alterations for staff safety including:

- Revising pick-up and drop-off collection points, procedures, signage and markings



- Considering methods to reduce frequency of deliveries, for example by ordering larger quantities less often.
- Where possible and safe, having single workers load or unload vehicles
- Where possible, using the same pairs of people for loads where more than one is needed
- Enabling drivers to access facilities when required, consistent with other guidance.

10. Resources

For full government guidance on social distancing in the workplace [see here](#) and specifically for outdoor or construction workplaces [see here](#)

Farming and maintaining animal welfare are important and can continue if done in accordance with the social distancing guidelines wherever possible. There are sector-specific challenges for agriculture and the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board has published further detail and best practice on how you might [carry out government guidance for agricultural workers on fruit and vegetable farms](#).

You may be providing a traineeship during coronavirus. There is government specific advice for [providing apprenticeships during coronavirus](#) which may be applicable.

Government guidance on:

- [Construction and outdoor work](#)
- [Shops and branches](#)
- [Vehicles](#)
- [Apprenticeship advice](#)
- [Cleaning after suspected contamination](#)

- [Risk assessment tools](#)
- Risk assessment [example 1](#) and [example 2](#)
- [AHDB guidance for seasonal agriculture workers](#)
- [Wales Coronavirus information pages](#)
- [Northern Ireland Coronavirus information pages](#)
- [Scotland Coronavirus information pages](#)