Re-Opening The Workplace

This guidance will assist employers, businesses, and their staff in re-opening safely during coronavirus (COVID-19) and as the lockdown is softened.

Acton Health and Safety understand that employers and businesses may have concerns about how they can re-open for business safely and play their part in preventing the spread of the virus. All employees should be encouraged to work from home unless it is impossible for them to do so. Not everyone can work from home: certain jobs require people to travel to, from and for their work – for instance to operate machinery, work in construction or manufacturing, or to deliver front line services.

We at Acton Health and Safety want to help you re-open your business with the most practical help and support for employers and businesses to protect your workforce and customers. With this in mind, we have built this pack to aid you in re-opening your business using the government's guidance which covers: -

- Information on Covid-19 (What we know)
    - Signs and symptoms of COVID-19
    - How COVID-19 is spread
    - How long the virus can survive
- The Plan
- Limiting spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) in business and workplaces
    - Use of face masks
    - Social distancing in the workplace - principles
    - Shift-working and staggering processes
- Moving goods
- Cleaning and waste disposal
    - Principles of cleaning after a suspect or confirmed case of (COVID-19)
    - Personal protective equipment (PPE)
    - Cleaning and disinfection
    - Laundry
    - Waste
- Handling post or packages
- Food safety
    - Staff canteens and rest areas
    - Food hygiene guidance
- Certifying absence from work
    - What to do if an employee needs time off work to look after someone
    - Sick pay
- Further help and support

What we Know

Signs and symptoms of COVID-19
The following symptoms may develop in the 14 days after exposure to someone who has COVID-19 infection:
- o Dry Cough
- o Sore Throat
- o Difficulty in Breathing
- o Tiredness
- o Fever

Generally, these infections can cause more severe symptoms in people with weakened immune systems, older people, and those with long-term conditions like diabetes, cancer and chronic lung disease.

How COVID-19 is spread
From what we know about other coronaviruses, spread of COVID-19 is most likely to happen when there is close contact (2 metres or less) with an infected person. It is likely that the risk increases the longer someone has close contact with an infected person.
Droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes containing the virus are the main means of transmission.

There are two main routes by which people can spread COVID-19:
- o Infection can be spread to people who are nearby (within 2 metres) such that droplets could be inhaled into the lungs.
- o It is also possible that someone may become infected by touching a surface, object or the hand of an infected person that has been contaminated with respiratory secretions and then touching their own mouth, nose, or eyes (such as touching door knob or shaking hands then touching own face)

How long the virus can survive
How long any respiratory virus survives will depend on a number of factors, for example:
- o What surface the virus is on
- o Whether it is exposed to sunlight
- o Differences in temperature and humidity
- o Exposure to cleaning products

Under most circumstances, the amount of infectious virus on any contaminated surfaces is likely to decrease significantly over 72 hours.
We know that similar viruses are transferred to and by people's hands. Therefore, regular hand hygiene and cleaning of frequently touched surfaces will help to reduce the risk of infection.

The Plan

- Businesses and workplaces should make every possible effort to enable working from home as a first option. Where working from home is not possible, workplaces should make every effort to comply with the social distancing guidelines set out by the government.
- Members of staff who are vulnerable or extremely vulnerable, as well as individuals whom they live with, should be supported as they follow the recommendations set out in guidance on social distancing and shielding respectively.
- Where the social distancing guidelines cannot be followed in full in relation to a particular activity, businesses should consider whether it is wise to re-open or if that activity needs to continue for the business to operate at this time, and, if so, take all the mitigating actions possible to reduce the risk of transmission between their staff.
- Staff who are unwell with symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) should not travel to or attend the workplace.
- Staff may be feeling anxious about coming to work and also about impacts on livelihood. Workplaces should ensure staff are fully briefed and appropriately supported at this time.
- Any member of staff who develops symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) (a new, continuous cough and/or a high temperature) should be sent home and stay at home for 7 days from onset of symptoms. If the member of staff lives in a household where someone else is unwell with symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) then they must stay at home in line with the stay at home guidance.
- Employees will need your support to adhere to the recommendation to stay at home to reduce the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) to others.
- Employees should be reminded to wash their hands for 20 seconds more frequently and catch coughs and sneezes in tissues.
- Frequently clean and disinfect objects and surfaces that are touched regularly, using your standard cleaning products.
- Those who follow advice to stay at home will be eligible for statutory sick pay (SSP) from the first day of their absence from work.
- Employers should use their discretion concerning the need for medical evidence for certification for employees who are unwell. This will allow GPs to focus on their patients.
- If evidence is required by an employer, those with symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) 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.
- Keep everyone updated on actions being taken to reduce risks of exposure to coronavirus (COVID-19) in the workplace.
- Make sure everyone's contact numbers and emergency contact details are up to date
- Make sure managers know how to spot symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) and are clear on any relevant processes, for example sickness reporting and sick pay, and procedures in case someone in the workplace is potentially infected and needs to take the appropriate action.
- Make sure there are places to wash hands for 20 seconds with soap and water and encourage everyone to do so regularly.
- Provide hand sanitiser and tissues for staff, and encourage them to use them.

Limiting spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) in business and workplaces
- Businesses and employers can help reduce the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) by reminding everyone of the public health advice. See [posters, leaflets and other materials](#).
- Employees and customers should be reminded to wash their hands for 20 seconds more frequently than normal.
- Employers should frequently clean and disinfect objects and surfaces that are touched regularly, using your standard cleaning products.

Use of face masks
There is very little evidence of widespread benefit from the use of face masks outside of the clinical or care settings, where they play a very important role. To be effective, face masks must be worn correctly, changed frequently, removed properly, disposed of safely and used in combination with good universal hygiene behaviour.
Research shows that compliance with these recommended behaviours reduces over time when wearing face masks for prolonged periods. Therefore, it is not advised to wear masks in public places and for those working in supermarkets, waste collection, schools and similar settings.

The current recommendations are that employers should ensure that:

Social distancing in the workplace: -
Spaces in the workplace are optimised to allow social distancing to occur, wherever possible
- Signs are visible in the workplace reminding employees not to attend work if they have a fever or cough and to avoid touching their eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Employees are provided with hand sanitiser for frequent use and regular breaks to allow them to wash their hands for 20 seconds.

The UK does not currently advise use of face masks outside of care settings, in line with [PPE guidance](#).
PHE will continually review guidance in line with emerging evidence and World Health Organization (WHO) guidance and update our guidance whenever new evidence suggests that we should do so.

Social distancing in the workplace - principles
Social distancing involves reducing day-to-day contact with other people as much as possible, in order to reduce the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19).
The practical implementation of this advice will depend on the local circumstances; see [examples for various industries](#).

A few general indicators will be relevant to the majority of business settings:
- Make regular announcements to remind staff and/or customers to follow social distancing advice and wash their hands regularly.
- Encourage the use of digital and remote transfers of material where possible rather than paper format, such as using e-forms, emails, e-banking and [Acton E-Docs](#).
- Provide additional pop-up handwashing stations or facilities if possible, providing soap, water, hand sanitiser and tissues and encourage staff to use them.

- Where it is possible to remain 2 metres apart, use floor markings to mark the distance, particularly in the most crowded areas (for example, where queues form)
- 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, keep teams of workers together (cohorting), and keep teams as small as possible.
- Additionally, for customer-facing businesses:
- Use signage to direct movement into lanes, if feasible, while maintaining a 2-metre distance.
- Regulate entry so that the premises do not become overcrowded.
- Use additional signage to ask customers not to enter the premises if they have symptoms.
- If feasible, place plexiglass barriers at points of regular interaction as an additional element of protection for workers and customers (where customers might touch or lean against these, ensure they are cleaned and disinfected as often as is feasible in line with standard cleaning procedures)
- See further information on social distancing and adults who are at increased risk of coronavirus (COVID-19).

Shift-working and staggering processes

When re-opening businesses and workplaces should make every possible effort to enable working from home as a first option. Where working from home is not possible, businesses should consider shift working or the staggering of processes which would enable staff to continue to operate both effectively and where possible at a safe distance (more than 2 metres) from one another. Staggering on-premises hours to reduce public transport use during peak periods will provide benefit to employees, businesses, and the wider public effort.

Practically, a business could consider:
- Splitting staff into teams with alternate days working from home, or splitting across a day and night shift.
- As far as possible, where staff are split into teams, fixing these splits (cohorting), so that where contact is unavoidable, this happens between the same individuals.
- Spreading out standard processes, so that only one team needs to be on the premises to complete a task at a given time.
- Where it is possible to remain 2 metres apart, using signage such as floor markings to facilitate compliance, particularly in the most crowded areas. This includes entry points to buildings, toilets and communal break areas where queues may form.
- Businesses working on shift patterns should:
- Ensure that the business's social distancing measures are effectively communicated to all staff.
- Ensure frequent cleaning and disinfecting of objects and surfaces that are touched regularly, using your standard cleaning products and particularly at the end and beginning of shifts.

Moving Goods
The World Health Organization (WHO) advises that the likelihood of an infected person contaminating commercial goods is low. The risk of catching the virus that causes COVID-19 from a physical package is also very low.

Cleaning and waste disposal
The risk of infection depends on many factors, including:
- The type of surfaces contaminated
- The amount of virus shed from the individual
- The time the individual spent in the setting
- The time since the individual was last in the setting

The infection risk from coronavirus (COVID-19) following contamination of the environment decreases over time. It is not yet clear at what point there is no risk. However, studies of other viruses in the same family suggest that, in most circumstances, the risk is likely to be reduced significantly after 72 hours.
- 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.
- 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.
- Using 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), use 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.

Principles of cleaning after a suspect or confirmed case of (COVID-19)

Personal protective equipment (PPE)
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.
If a risk assessment of the setting indicates that a higher level of virus may be present or there is visible contamination with body fluids, then the need for additional PPE to protect the cleaner's eyes, mouth and nose might be necessary.

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

All surfaces that the symptomatic person has come into contact with must be cleaned and disinfected, including:

- Objects which are visibly contaminated with body fluids.
- All potentially contaminated high-contact areas such as bathrooms, door handles, telephones, grab-rails in corridors and stairwells.
- Use disposable cloths or paper roll and disposable mop heads, to clean all hard surfaces, floors, chairs, door handles and sanitary fittings, following one of the options below:
  - Use either a combined detergent disinfectant solution at a dilution of 1,000 parts per million available chlorine.
  - A household detergent followed by disinfection (1000 ppm av.cl.). Follow manufacturer's instructions for dilution, application and contact times for all detergents and disinfectants.
  - If an alternative disinfectant is used within the organisation, this should be checked and ensure that it is effective against enveloped viruses.
- Avoid creating splashes and spray when cleaning.
- Any cloths and mop heads used must be disposed of and should be put into waste bags as outlined below.

When items cannot be cleaned using detergents or laundered, for example, upholstered furniture and mattresses, steam cleaning should be used.

Any items that are heavily contaminated with body fluids and cannot be cleaned by washing should be disposed of.

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.

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.

- If the individual tests negative, this can be put in with the normal waste.
- If the individual tests positive, then store it for at least 72 hours and put in with the normal waste.

If storage for at least 72 hours is not appropriate, arrange for collection as a Category B infectious waste either by your local waste collection authority if they currently collect your

waste or otherwise by a specialist clinical waste contractor. They will supply you with orange clinical waste bags for you to place your bags into so the waste can be sent for appropriate treatment.

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.

Food safety

Staff canteens and rest areas
It is very unlikely that coronavirus is transmitted through food. Workplace canteens may remain open where there are no practical alternatives for staff to obtain food.
- As far as reasonably possible, a distance of 2 metres should be maintained between users.
- Staff can continue to use rest areas if they apply the same social distancing.
- Notices promoting hand hygiene and social distancing should be placed visibly in these areas.
- If possible, increase the number of hand washing stations available.

Food hygiene guidance
A Food Safety Management System (FSMS) that includes existing food hygiene guidance and HACCP processes should be followed (Support and training can be found at Acton Health and Safety). It is very unlikely that you can catch coronavirus from food. COVID-19 is a respiratory illness. It is not known to be transmitted by exposure to food or food packaging.

Any food handler who is unwell should not be at work. If they have symptoms, they should follow government advice and stay at home.

As a matter of good hygiene practice anyone handling food should wash their hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. This should be done as a matter of routine, before and after handling food, and especially after being in a public place, blowing their nose, coughing, or sneezing.

Food business operators should continue to follow the Food Standard Agency's (FSA) guidance on good hygiene practices in food preparation and their Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) processes.

Frequently clean and disinfect objects and surfaces that are touched regularly, using your standard cleaning products.

Food businesses can refer to the Food Standards Agency's safer food, better business (SFBB) guidance for further guidance on expected food hygiene standards.

Businesses can help reduce the spread of coronavirus by reminding everyone of the government's public health advice. Posters, leaflets and other materials are available online.

Certifying absence from work

By law, medical evidence is not required for the first 7 days of sickness. After 7 days, employers may use their discretion around the need for medical evidence if an employee is staying at home.

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 either as they are unwell themselves, or live with someone who is, in accordance with the public health advice issued by the government.

What to do if an employee needs time off work to look after someone

Employees are entitled to time off work to help someone who depends on them (a 'dependant') in an unexpected event or emergency. This would apply to situations related to coronavirus (COVID-19). For example:

- If they have children they need to look after or arrange childcare for because their school has closed.
- To help their child or another dependant if they're sick or need to go into isolation or hospital.

There's no statutory right to pay for this time off, but some employers might offer pay depending on the contract or workplace policy.

Sick pay

Those who are self-isolating because they or someone in their household is displaying symptoms of coronavirus will be eligible for Statutory Sick pay (SSP).

SSP is also available to those who are staying at home because they're at high risk of severe illness from coronavirus (shielding).

Employers should use their discretion and respect the medical need to self-isolate in making decisions about sick pay.

Anyone not eligible to receive sick pay, including those earning less than an average of £118 per week, some of those working in the gig economy, or self-employed people, is able to claim Universal Credit and/or contributory Employment and Support Allowance.

For those on a low income and already claiming Universal Credit, it is designed to automatically adjust depending on people's earnings or other income. However, if someone needs money urgently, they can apply for an advance through the journal in their Universal Credit account.

See the Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) guidance for more information.

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Further help and support
Acton Health and Safety are here for more help and support email, call or visit the website at: -
- info@actonhealthandsafety.co.uk
- 07956067812
- www.actonhealthandsafety.co.uk

We are happy to help with specific queries and any support you may need.