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Return to Work risk assessment guidance

**Workplace COVID-19 Transmission**

Return to Work risk assessment guidance

**Workplace COVID-19 Transmission**

After several weeks of significant disruption to routine operations for organisations, the UK Government are planning a gradual relaxation of lockdown measures to reduce the economic impact on work while managing health protection. Organisations will need to plan and manage the return to the workplace of workers [1]. The UK Government have provided industry specific guidance on ‘Working safely during coronavirus (COVID-19)’ which can be viewed here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

There is a need to carry out 2 main forms of risk assessment:

* COVID-19 Workplace Risk Assessment for COVID-19 transmission– *for the whole workplace (This document)*
* COVID-19 Individual Health Vulnerability Assessment [2]– *only* *for workers with underlying health conditions that increase their susceptibility to severe COVID-19 symptoms and are not in a Shielding group*

COVID-19 is thought to be transmitted by two main mechanisms [3]

1. Droplet spread

This occurs directly from people who are infected when they cough or sneeze. These droplets can be inhaled by others causing infection. This is the reason for the 2 metre social distancing and ‘Catch it, Kill it, Bin it’ advice. There is some evidence that droplet spread from a sneeze can travel further than 2 metres.

1. Contact from a contaminated surface  
   When droplets land on surfaces, they become contaminated. People then touch these surfaces and their hands become contaminated. From there, they can convey the infection to other surfaces or infect themselves by touching their eyes, nose or mouth. This is why the advice is to regularly wash our hands and to clean surfaces regularly.

An understanding of these methods of spread helps with risk identification and control.

**Areas for Consideration**

The following areas will cover the main workplace transmission risks. Information is given on control measures for consideration but is not exhaustive [4]. It is likely control measures will need to be in place for a number of months at least. Employers should also consider any additional or special areas of risk for their specific organization.

1. Travel to and from and for work
2. Workplace Entry and Exit
3. Workstation Spacing and Staff Density
4. Patient/Public/Service user facing
5. Movement in the workplace
6. Rest and Welfare facilities
7. Workplace surface hygiene
8. Hand hygiene [5]
9. Symptomatic people in the workplace [6]
10. Home Visiting
11. Provision of personal care/Direct healthcare – Special settings
12. Education and promotion of control measures

**Notes on Risk Assessment**

1. The suggested areas for consideration are focused on COVID-19 infection transmission in the workplace. Employers will still need to consider other standard risks such as ergonomics, manual handling and mental health risks. Home workers should have consideration for isolation and ergonomic factors.
2. A suggested grading of risk into Low, Standard, Medium and High is used for the risk level judgement once control measures are in place.
   1. **Low** risk is likely to apply to working at home situations.
   2. **Standard** risk is likely to apply to a typical workplace setting where the risk is not present or can be well controlled.
   3. **Medium** risk is likely to apply where the risk is present and residual risk remains albeit reduced by the control measures.
   4. **High** risk is likely to apply where the risk cannot be significantly controlled
3. It is good practice to involve workers in the risk assessment process and to consult with them on any other areas of concern not considered.
4. This risk assessment is for workplace COVID-19 transmission risk and our recommendation is that, in addition, individuals with COVID-19 vulnerability will require an individual health vulnerability risk assessment.
5. The 5 steps to risk assessment – as outlined by the Health & Safety Executive [7] – are as follows:  
   * **Identify the hazards** – in this case, the hazards of transmission of COVID-19 from work activity
   * **Decide who may be harmed and how** – all workers are at risk of COVID-19 infection Some individuals are at higher risk of severe disease and you should consider seeking Occupational Health advice for individual vulnerability to severe COVID-19 infection.
   * **Evaluate the risk and decide on control measures** – this document allows a structured approach to risk identification and control measures you can put in place. The suitability of controls will come down to the individual organizational needs. What is suitable for one organization may not be for another. Also refer to UK Government guidance.
   * **Record the findings and implement control measures** – the risk assessment sections of this document are in Word format and can be used to record your findings and control measures you are able to put in place.
   * **Review the risk assessment** – the pace of change of advice is significant and guidance is issued by multiple organisations. It is important that you keep up to date particularly with guidance from the Government (including devolved nations), Public Health and the Health and Safety Executive.

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Return to Work risk assessment template

**Workplace COVID-19 Transmission**

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| **Risk 1** | **Travel** | | | | | | | | |
| **Mechanism of Risk** | Travel to and from work increases the risk of COVID-19 infection either through contaminated surface contact or droplet spread. This is particularly so with public transport because of the high throughput of different people, some of whom may be infected, and if the transport is crowded. Also, workers who need to visit the homes of customers enter into uncontrolled environments where there may be infected householders – droplet and surface spread. | | | | | | | | |
| **Possible control measures to minimize risk** | Home working. Consider private transport facilitation such as parking spaces. Stagger start and finish times to avoid peak travel times on public transport. A combination of home and workplace locations. Encourage staff to be additionally vigilant for touching surfaces and then face. Use hand hygiene measures. If recommended at the time, use of face coverings. | | | | | | | | |
| **What control measures are to be implemented?** |  | | | | | | | | |
| **Level of risk with control measures in place** | Low |  | Standard |  | Medium |  | High |  |  |

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| **Risk 2** | **Workplace entry and exit, including clothing change** | | | | | | | | |
| **Mechanism of Risk** | Being closer increasing droplet spread risk and high throughput with surface contamination risk | | | | | | | | |
| **Possible control measures to minimize risk** | Stagger start and finish times. Increase the space available. Increase cleaning regime e.g. wipe down after sitting to change. Cohorting – split work teams. Mark out spacing on the floor. Suspend need for electronic pass to be contact read, reducing contamination of high touch area. Open doors at peak times to minimize door push/pull contact (not Fire Doors). | | | | | | | | |
| **What control measures are to be implemented?** |  | | | | | | | | |
| **Level of risk with control measures in place** | Low |  | Standard |  | Medium |  | High |  |  |

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| **Risk 3** | **Workstation Spacing and Staff Density** | | | | | | | | |
| **Mechanism of Risk** | Not maintaining social distancing (>2m) increases the risk of droplet spread. The more different people in a particular workspace, the higher the risk of infection, including surface contamination. | | | | | | | | |
| **Possible control measures to minimize risk** | Reduce the number of staff presenting to the workplace, mix home and workplace attendance, Cohorting of work groups. Space planning to separate out workstations, turn desks so workers are back to back or side to side, physical shielding. Minimise or avoid hot desking. Implementing a pre and post use cleaning instruction and materials for shared workstations. | | | | | | | | |
| **What control measures are to be implemented?** |  | | | | | | | | |
| **Level of risk with control measures in place** | Low |  | Standard |  | Medium |  | High |  |  |

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| **Risk 4** | **Patient/Public/Service User Facing** | | | | | | | | |
| **Mechanism of Risk** | These groups of people are a diverse group of people who may not understand or fully implement national public health advice such as home isolation and hand hygiene. Patients presenting with symptoms of COVID-19 are a particular risk. Transmission is by worker contact with infectious patients, members of the pubic or social care or other service users. | | | | | | | | |
| **Possible control measures to minimize risk** | Avoid or minimize visitors to your site. Provide services online, remotely. Increase distance at essential interaction points, consider shielding e.g. Perspex. For some roles e.g. direct provision of healthcare or social care, some contact is necessary so the risk cannot be fully removed. Specific guidance is published for health and social care. | | | | | | | | |
| **What control measures are to be implemented?** |  | | | | | | | | |
| **Level of risk with control measures in place** | Low |  | Standard |  | Medium |  | High |  |  |

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| **Risk 5** | **Movement of people in the workplace** | | | | | | | | |
| **Mechanism of Risk** | Droplet spread from not maintaining social distance and contact with high touch surfaces. | | | | | | | | |
| **Possible control measures to minimize risk** | Reduce the number of people, minimize movement e.g. internal call rather than face to face. Maintain distance when face to face or passing in corridors and minimize time people are within 2m of each other. Use stairs rather than lifts, don’t share lifts. Prioritise lifts based on physical exertion ability. Staggering work start and finish and breaks. Avoid areas of staff build up e.g. shared copiers, coffee, water facilities. Spacings on floor to identify 2m distance. Separate customers/visitors from staff by 2m at least. | | | | | | | | |
| **What control measures are to be implemented?** |  | | | | | | | | |
| **Level of risk with control measures in place** | Low |  | Standard |  | Medium |  | High |  |  |

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| **Risk 6** | **Rest and Welfare facilities** | | | | | | | | |
| **Mechanism of Risk** | Higher density of people and high throughout of different people in a concentrated space. Surface contact and droplet spread. Catering supply can create queues and increase person to person interaction. | | | | | | | | |
| **Possible control measures to minimize risk** | As for earlier sections, reducing number of staff on site reduces risk. Stagger break times, quick hygiene protocol e.g. cleaning/spraying seats and tables used. For toilet facilities, have external spaced queue to maintain distance within facilities. Encourage staff to bring their own food with them. Increase cleaning schedule for high touch areas e.g. button on water dispenser. | | | | | | | | |
| **What control measures are to be implemented?** |  | | | | | | | | |
| **Level of risk with control measures in place** | Low |  | Standard |  | Medium |  | High |  |  |

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| **Risk 7** | **Workplace surface and waste hygiene** | | | | | | | | |
| **Mechanism of Risk** | Contaminated surface contact and then ingestion or further spread. | | | | | | | | |
| **Possible control measures to minimize risk** | Keeping surfaces clean is a key infection control measure. Increase the cleaning schedule for communal areas using suitable cleaning products at appropriate dilution/concentration. Particular attention to high touch areas such as door handles/push plates, lift controls and handrails. Individual work areas can be cleaned before and after use by the user with products provided. | | | | | | | | |
| **What control measures are to be implemented?** |  | | | | | | | | |
| **Level of risk with control measures in place** | Low |  | Standard |  | Medium |  | High |  |  |

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| **Risk 8** | **Hand Hygiene** | | | | | | | | |
| **Mechanism of Risk** | Contaminated hands causing inoculation of virus through mucous membranes e.g. eyes, mouth or nose. Transmission of contamination onto other surfaces. | | | | | | | | |
| **Possible control measures to minimize risk** | Encourage regular use of handwashing facilities – soap and running hot water – for at least 20 seconds as per public health education. This is the best option. Put up posters from Public Health including above basins to encourage adequate handwashing frequency. Provision of hand sanitizer, ideally personally or located around the workplace. Allow additional work breaks for handwashing. Avoid touching of face. Clean high contact surfaces as in earlier section. | | | | | | | | |
| **What control measures are to be implemented?** |  | | | | | | | | |
| **Level of risk with control measures in place** | Low |  | Standard |  | Medium |  | High |  |  |

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| **Risk 9** | **Symptomatic people in the workplace** | | | | | | | | |
| **Mechanism of Risk** | Although there is evidence that asymptomatic people can transmit COVID-19 infection, symptomatic people are thought to be more infectious. | | | | | | | | |
| **Possible control measures to minimize risk** | All people in the UK should be following Home Isolation guidance issued by Public Health. Make sure employees are aware of the Home Isolation rules and are not discouraged from staying away from work if symptomatic or have a potential household contact. Access to COVID-19 testing is increasing and at present, Key Workers or those over the age of 65 (or their family members) can access tests if symptomatic. This will minimize the impact of unnecessary home isolation. Make sure employees and managers are aware of how to access this service for eligible workers. Signage to remind workers of COVID-19 symptoms and the rules around home isolation. Protocol for workers who become ill at work to include prompt notification, and sanctioning leaving the workplace to travel home.  [6] <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance> | | | | | | | | |
| **What control measures are to be implemented?** |  | | | | | | | | |
| **Level of risk with control measures in place** | Low |  | Standard |  | Medium |  | High |  |  |

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| **Risk 10** | **Home visiting** | | | | | | | | |
| **Mechanism of Risk** | Surface contact or droplet spread in an uncontrolled environment such as when entering a customer home e.g. emergency repair work, providing personal care and support to service users. | | | | | | | | |
| **Possible control measures to minimize risk** | Avoidance of home visiting where possible, use of video or telephone calls. Calling ahead to confirm that no household contact is isolating or presenting with COVID-19 symptoms. Asking householders to clear the work area in advance to reduce the need to handle items and for householders to remain at least 2m from the worker. Risk to vulnerable householders – need to check in advance. See UK Government guidance: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/homes> | | | | | | | | |
| **What control measures are to be implemented?** |  | | | | | | | | |
| **Level of risk with control measures in place** | Low |  | Standard |  | Medium |  | High |  |  |

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| **Risk 11** | **Provision of personal care/Direct healthcare – Special settings** | | | | | | | | |
| **Mechanism of Risk** | Close contact causing inhalation of infective droplets or contact with infected body parts of surfaces and onward transmission or self-inoculation. | | | | | | | | |
| **Possible control measures to minimize risk** | See current PPE recommendations for such interactions which include disposable aprons, gloves, RPE – face mask or higher grade RPE (such as for Aerosol Generating Procedures -AGPs). Screening for service users or patients for COVID-19 symptoms before interactions, where possible. Exclusion of workers from this work if they have sufficient underlying health risk. | | | | | | | | |
| **What control measures are to be implemented?** |  | | | | | | | | |
| **Level of risk with control measures in place** | Low |  | Standard |  | Medium |  | High |  |  |

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| **Risk 12** | **Failure of workers to follow workplace control measures and guidance** | | | | | | | | |
| **Mechanism of Risk** | Control measures that inform the risk assessment need to be followed by workers. If not followed consistently, risk control will break down. | | | | | | | | |
| **Possible control measures to minimize risk** | All staff need induction and training in the control measures implemented. Many may be new measures. Use of posters, manager supervision and regular reiteration will assist. Ensure supplies of cleaning materials, hand sanitizer, washroom supplies are planned for any maintained. Likely lead times for supply will be increased. | | | | | | | | |
| **What control measures are to be implemented?** |  | | | | | | | | |
| **Level of risk with control measures in place** | Low |  | Standard |  | Medium |  | High |  |  |

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| **Additional Risks** |  | | | | | | | | |
| **Mechanism of Risk** |  | | | | | | | | |
| **Possible control measures to minimize risk** |  | | | | | | | | |
| **What control measures are to be implemented?** |  | | | | | | | | |
| **Level of risk with control measures in place** | Low |  | Standard |  | Medium |  | High |  |  |

**Summary of COVID-19 Transmission Risk**

Having completed the assessment of COVID-19 transmission risk for each of the areas identified above, summarise the residual risk in the table below.

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|  |  | Based on risk ***after*** control measures are implemented | | | |
| **Risk ID** | **COVID-19 Transmission Risk Factors** | **Low \*** | **Standard** | **Medium** | **High** |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **1** | Travel |  |  |  |  |
| **2** | Workplace entry and exit |  |  |  |  |
| **3** | Workstation Spacing and Staff Density |  |  |  |  |
| **4** | Patient/Public/Service User facing |  |  |  |  |
| **5** | Movement in the workplace |  |  |  |  |
| **6** | Rest and Welfare facilities |  |  |  |  |
| **7** | Workplace surface hygiene |  |  |  |  |
| **8** | Hand hygiene |  |  |  |  |
| **9** | Symptomatic people in the workplace |  |  |  |  |
| **10** | Home visiting |  |  |  |  |
| **11** | Provision of personal care/Direct healthcare – Special settings |  |  |  |  |
| **12** | Failure of workers to follow workplace control measures and guidance |  |  |  |  |
| **13** | Additional Risks Identified |  |  |  |  |

*\*a low risk environment is likely to be home working or isolated, non-shared office working*

**References**

[1] <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/guidance-for-employers-and-businesses-on-coronavirus-covid-19>

[2] <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>

[3] <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/881489/COVID-19_Infection_prevention_and_control_guidance_complete.pdf>

[4] <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/social-distancing-in-the-workplace-during-coronavirus-covid-19-sector-guidance>

[5]https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\_data/file/876212/COVID19\_Guidance\_Employers\_and\_businesses\_.pdf

[6] <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance>

[7] <https://www.hse.gov.uk/risk/controlling-risks.htm>

**Working from Home during the COVID-19 pandemic**

**Ergonomic and Mental Health Resources**

Home working is likely to be the lowest risk situation for COVID-19 transmission but many workers may be more productive or manage to collaborate better by attending the workplace. Some workers are unable to do their jobs from home. There will also be some employees who have underlying health vulnerability to severe COVID-19 infection which means they are unable to present to the workplace safely.

**Ergonomic issues**

Home workers will likely be carrying out duties using a computer and telephone. This can create some ergonomic issues.

The Health & Safety Executive (HSE) have a specific resource for home workers at:

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/workers/home.htm>

This site has a short video which gives sensible and practical advice to home workers about their ergonomics as well as a checklist for employees to review.

**Psychological Issues**

One of the more notable effects of prolonged home working is in relation to feelings of isolation, combined with the limiting effect of general social isolation measures that have been implemented. This can have an adverse impact on mental health.

Keeping in touch with employees, ideally with voice or video calls, can help maintain contact and team cohesion and reduce feelings of isolation. There are also many sources of help and support.

* **EAP -** If you have one in place, make sure you are promoting your Employee Assistance Programme (EAP).
* **Living Life to the Full** is a long established online mental health resource who have produced a specific Coronavirus wellbeing information leaflet covering physical and mental wellbeing. It can be downloaded and emailed to staff.  
    
  <https://llttf.com/wp-content/uploads/LLTTF-Coronavirus-for-adults-at-home.pdf>
* **National Mental Health Charities**, such as MIND and Every Mind Matters have specific advice for mental wellbeing with excellent resources available online.  
    
  <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/>