

COVID-19

STAYING SAFE AT WORK

The COVID-19 crisis is putting pressure on employers and workers, whether they had to implement new procedures and practices in a very short time, or suspend their work and business.

We're committed to ensuring that the mental and physical health, safety and welfare of our members is protected. We intend to make the greatest possible effort in safeguarding and providing for continued improvements in occupational safety and health regarding our members.

This document is to help employers, employees and the self-employed in the UK understand how to work safely during the COVID-19 pandemic, keeping as many people as possible 2m apart from those they do not live with. We hope it gives you a practical framework to think about what you need to do to continue, or restart, operations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It also sets out guidance on how to work safely and gives practical considerations of how this can be applied in the workplace.

What is Covid19?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses which may cause illness in animals or humans.

Several coronaviruses are known to cause respiratory infections ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome.

The most recently discovered coronavirus causes coronavirus disease COVID 19.

What are the Symptoms of COVID 19?

The NHS and the WHO identify the following potential symptoms of COVID-19;

- A high temperature- this means you feel hot to touch on your chest or back
- A new, continuous cough-this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or 3 or more coughing episodes in 24hrs
- Tiredness
- Some patients may have aches and pains, nasal congestion, sore throat or diarrhoea

If someone has coronavirus symptoms at work

If someone becomes unwell in the workplace with coronavirus symptoms, they should;

- Tell their employer immediately and go home
- Avoid touching anything
- Cough or sneeze into a tissue and put it in a bin, or if they do not have tissues cough and sneeze into the crook of their elbow
- Use a separate bathroom from others, if possible

If the unwell person lives alone, they must self-isolate for 7 days. If they live with others and is the first to have symptoms, they must self-isolate for 7 days. Everyone else in their household must self-isolate for 14 days.

If anyone else in the household starts displaying symptoms, the person with the new symptoms must self-isolate for 7 days. This is regardless of where they are in the 14-day isolation period.

NHS Contact Details

England

If you have symptoms of coronavirus (a high temperature or a new, continuous cough), use the online [111 coronavirus service](#).

If you need help or advice not related to coronavirus:

- For urgent medical help, use the NHS 111 online service – only call 111 if you're unable to get help online
- For life-threatening emergencies, call 999 for an ambulance
- For health information and advice, use the NHS website or your GP surgery website

Wales

Use the NHS 111 Wales online coronavirus service [here](#) if you feel you have symptoms of coronavirus.

Call 111 Wales only if you cannot get help online.

Babies and children

Call NHS 111 Wales for advice if you're worried about a baby or child. If they seem very unwell, are getting worse or you think there's something seriously wrong, call 999.

Scotland & Northern Ireland

If you have concerns about Coronavirus (COVID-19) and are worried about symptoms, you must stay home and call your GP or NHS 24 (111) out of hours where you will receive help.

You can check specific guidance for Scotland [here](#), and for Northern Ireland [here](#).

Do not delay getting help if you're worried. Trust your instincts.

Controlling Risks in the Workplace

Covid 19 Risk Assessment

The Government has made clear that all who can work from home should continue to do so. If that's not possible, then before employees return to work employers must undertake a risk assessment to ensure workplaces are 'COVID-secure'.

As part of managing the health and safety of your business, you must control the risks in your business. To do this you need to think about what might cause harm to people and decide whether you are taking reasonable steps to prevent that harm.

This is known as risk assessment and it is something you are required by law to carry out. If you have fewer than five employees, you don't have to write anything down. Everyone needs to assess and manage the risks of COVID -19. As an employer, you also have a legal responsibility to protect workers and others from risk to their health and safety.

You must make sure that the risk assessment for your business addresses the risks of COVID 19, using this document will assist you. *As a general guide there are 5 Steps to Risk Assessment;*

- Identify the Hazards
- Decide who might be harmed and how
- Evaluate the risks and decide the precautions
- Record your significant findings
- Review and update as necessary

You can find interactive tools available to support you from the [Health and Safety Executive \(HSE\)](#).

Employee Engagement

Employers have a duty to consult their people on Health and Safety. You must consult with the health and safety representative selected by a recognised trade union. As an employer you cannot decide who the representative will be.

At its most effective, full involvement of your workers creates a culture where relationships between employers and workers are based on partnership, trust and joint problem solving.

As is normal practice, workers should be involved in assessing workplace risks and the development and review of workplace health and safety policies in partnership with the employer.

- **Ensure to consult employees on Health and Safety and involve them in the decision-making process**
- **Make sure engagement includes the health and safety representative and union**
- **Good employee engagement will ensure trust and collaboration between employer and employees**
- **All risk assessments should be done in collaboration with employees and union representatives**

Trade Union Safety Reps should also be consulted about how the risk assessment is carried out and the measures to be taken as a result of the assessment. They have the right of access to the written risk assessment where there are more than 5 employees.

If outside experts are used, any report they produce should also be made available.

We encourage employers to publish their risk assessments in line with government guidance.

Role of the Trade Union Health and Safety Rep in Risk Assessment;

- Monitor that assessments are carried out thoroughly and correctly
- Contribute their knowledge and experience
- Ensure all hazards are identified and risks evaluated
- Ensure control measures are appropriate to protect workers and others
- Confirm the information is shared to all those who need to know
- Ensure the results are complied with
- Make sure assessments are reviewed, revisited and updated as often as necessary

Equality in the Workplace

In applying this guidance, employers should be mindful of the needs of different groups of workers or individuals.

Think about who could be at risk:

We know that coronavirus may affect some people more than others, the risk of coronavirus by demographic factors shows that older people and those with underlying illnesses may be at greater risk. Men seem to be at greater risk than women and ethnicity could be a factor.

Concerning evidence is emerging about the unequal impact COVID-19 is having on BAME workers. Employers should ensure that line managers are supported to have thorough, sensitive and comprehensive conversations with their BAME staff. They should identify any existing underlying health conditions that may increase the risks in undertaking frontline roles, in any capacity.

Most importantly, the conversations should also, on an ongoing basis, consider the feelings of BAME colleagues, particularly with regard to safety and mental health. Managers should also seek and follow occupational health advice where appropriate.

Employers should consider planning for workers who are vulnerable or shielding and should encourage that they continue where possible to work from home as well as planning for workers who have someone who is shielding in their household. Some things to consider may be reasonable adjustments, furlough or staggered shifts which would help to reduce the chance of transmission.

It is breaking the law to discriminate, directly or indirectly, against anyone because of a protected characteristic such as age, sex or disability.

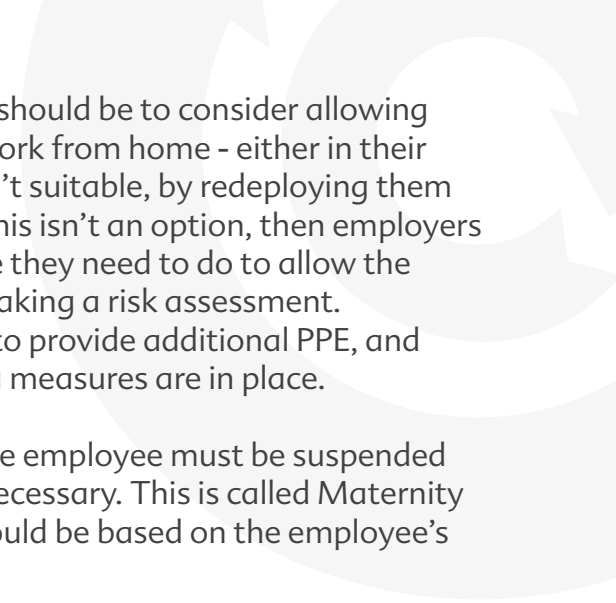
Further, employers also have particular responsibilities towards disabled workers and those who are new or expectant mothers.

Pregnant Women

All employers have a duty to assess workplace risks and this must specifically include risks to pregnant women (at any stage of pregnancy) and new mothers. Employers must take reasonable action to remove the risks.

Although this obligation only applies if there is an increased level of risk at work above what would occur outside the workplace, most workplaces are likely to have a higher risk of infection than you would face in everyday life outside the workplace at the current time.

Travel to and from work should also be considered when assessing the risk, as well as social distancing guidelines. If a risk assessment identifies that pregnant women will face risks beyond the levels found outside the workplace, then the employer should act.



The first step in this process should be to consider allowing the pregnant employee to work from home - either in their current role, or if their job isn't suitable, by redeploying them to a different role that is. If this isn't an option, then employers should identify anything else they need to do to allow the employee to work by undertaking a risk assessment. This might mean they need to provide additional PPE, and ensure that social distancing measures are in place.

If that's not possible, then the employee must be suspended on full pay for as long as is necessary. This is called Maternity Suspension. This full pay should be based on the employee's usual earnings.

Government guidance on working safely published on 11 May covers all types of work and says:

If clinically vulnerable (this includes pregnant women) individuals cannot work from home, they should be offered the option of the safest available on-site roles, enabling them to stay 2m away from others. If they have to spend time within 2m of others, you should carefully assess whether this involves an acceptable level of risk.

As for any workplace risk you must take into account specific duties to those with protected characteristics, including, for example, expectant mothers who are, as always, entitled to suspension on full pay if suitable roles cannot be found.

If there is a health and safety risk, that cannot be mitigated, the employee should be suspended on 100% of pay. However, if the employee is furloughed because the employer has been affected by lack of demand, but there is no health and safety risk then the employee should be furloughed on the same terms as other colleagues who are not pregnant.

It may be pregnancy discrimination if an employer refuses to provide furlough during pregnancy and insists that pregnant employees take unpaid leave or start their maternity leave early or if employers pay pregnant employees Statutory Sick Pay while other colleagues are being paid 80% on furlough.

Key Control Measures for Employers

Social distancing at work

To maintain 2m social distancing wherever possible, including while arriving at and departing from work, while in work, and when travelling between sites. You must maintain social distancing in the workplace wherever possible.

Where the social distancing guidelines cannot be followed in full in relation to a particular activity, business should consider whether that activity needs to continue for the business to operate and, if so, take all the mitigating actions possible to reduce the risk of transmission between their staff.

Mitigating actions include;

- Further increasing the frequency of handwashing and surface cleaning
- Keeping the activity time involved as short as possible
- Using screens or barriers to separate people from each other
- Using back to back or side to side working (rather than face to face)
- Reducing the number of people each person has contact with by using 'fixed teams or partnering' (so each person works with only a few others)
- Social distancing applies to all parts of a business, not just the place where people spend most of their time, but also entrances and exits, break rooms and canteens and similar settings

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- If the 2m guidance lines cannot be maintained, risk assess the activity using the hierarchy of controls and against any sector specific guidance, being mindful that masks (RPE) are the last resort in the hierarchy.
- Re-usable PPE should be thoroughly cleaned after use and not shared between employees
- Single use PPE should be disposed of so that it cannot be reused
- PPE and RPE should still be used in working environments that would normally require the use of face masks, i.e. when working with hazardous substances such as gases, solvents, powdered chemicals, mists and sprays or entering a confined space
- If face masks are used, ensure the masks fit.

Vulnerable Employees

As per NHS guidelines vulnerable employees include, but are not limited to those who;

- Have a long-term health condition, for example asthma, diabetes or heart disease or a weakened immune system
- Are pregnant
- Are aged over 70
- Care for someone with a health condition that might put them at a greater risk

Procedures should be in place to correctly identify vulnerable employees and assess possible measures to take.

Furthermore, consider;

- Assign tasks that can be done in self-isolation for vulnerable employees
- Take extra care of vulnerable employees such as reception staff with their frequent interaction with visitors

- Carry out a new risk assessment for all pregnant women, to identify the risks and consider what measures can be put in place to protect them

Hygiene considerations;

- Increase availability of hand sanitisers onsite at key points
- Allow regular breaks to wash hands
- Provide additional handwashing facilities
- Ensure adequate supplies of soap and freshwater are readily available
- Regularly clean the handwashing facilities

Toilet Facilities

- Ensure provision of paper towels in the washrooms
- Use signage to clarify the maximum number of people that can use toilet facilities at any one time
- Use signage such as floor markings, to ensure the 2m distance is maintained between people when queuing

Office Areas

- Measures should be implemented to maintain 2m distance
- Reduce the number of employees in the office at any time
- Utilise home working
- Where possible move desks to ensure 2m distance

Common Areas

- Assess the possibility of social distancing in common areas
- Consider possible control measures;

- Closing common areas
- Changing area layout to create more space for movement
- Only one person allowed in the elevator

Canteens and lunch areas

- Encourage employees to bring their own food. If canteens available, consider providing a takeaway service
- Stagger breaks and request employees to avoid having meals together
- Consider increasing the number or size of the lunch area available on site if possible
- The capacity of each canteen or rest area should be clearly identified at the entry to each facility
- Hand sanitisers should be made available at the entrance of any room

Site Access

- Reduce external visitors/contractors onto the site, where possible, and create clear guidelines to manage and minimise the risk
- Plan site access and egress points to enable social distancing- there may be a need to change the number of access points, either increase to reduce congestion or decrease to enable monitoring, including the case of emergencies
- Clear signage should be displayed at all access points stating how to gain access and about the 2m rule
- Discourage employees from entering parts of the site unless essential to their role

Driving at Work

When travelling at work or between site locations, employees should travel alone. If they have no option but to share a vehicle, then they should consider;

- Share with the same individuals and with the minimum number of people at any one time
- Maintain good ventilation
- Regularly clean the vehicle using gloves and standard cleaning products with emphasis on handles and other surfaces which may be touched during the journey
- Wash their hands for 20 seconds using soap and water or hand sanitiser before entering and after getting out of the vehicle.

First Aid and Emergency Response

The Government has published specific guidance for first responders

Enhanced site cleaning

- Regularly disinfect and clean welfare and communal facilities
- Introduce cleaning routines for shared workstations and equipment
- Assess which parts of the machines the employees touch and introduce a rota for cleaning these areas
- If any employees have tested positive for COVID 19 please find decontamination procedures [here](#)

Returning to work after isolation or infection

- Be aware of any national guidance on returning employees
- Conduct return to work interviews to assess the employee, prepare them to come back and help monitor the situation
- Consider the impact of returners on those at work

- Consider travel to work limitations if many employees return at the same time
- Consider the mental health of returners on those at work

What if you Don't Feel your Workplace is Safe?

Asking people to work in an unsafe workplace is a breach of health and safety law and could be putting lives at risk.

As a last resort, when faced with a dangerous working environment which cannot reasonably be averted, every employee (not applicable to workers or the self-employed) has the right not to suffer detriment if they leave, or refuse to attend their place of work (or take other appropriate steps) in circumstances where they reasonably believe there is a risk of being exposed to serious and imminent danger (section 44 of the Employment Rights Act 1996).

If you feel you are being put at risk it is crucial to get advice before you act from your Community Health and Safety representative, your Community regional team or contact our health & safety hotline at: **hands@community-tu.org**

Get in touch

If you're having difficulty or problems at work during the Covid-19 pandemic, get in touch with our Member Service Centre by calling **0800 389 6332** or emailing **servicecentre@community-tu.org**.

We are Community. The modern union for a changing world.
Tel: 0800 389 6332 • **Email:** servicecentre@community-tu.org