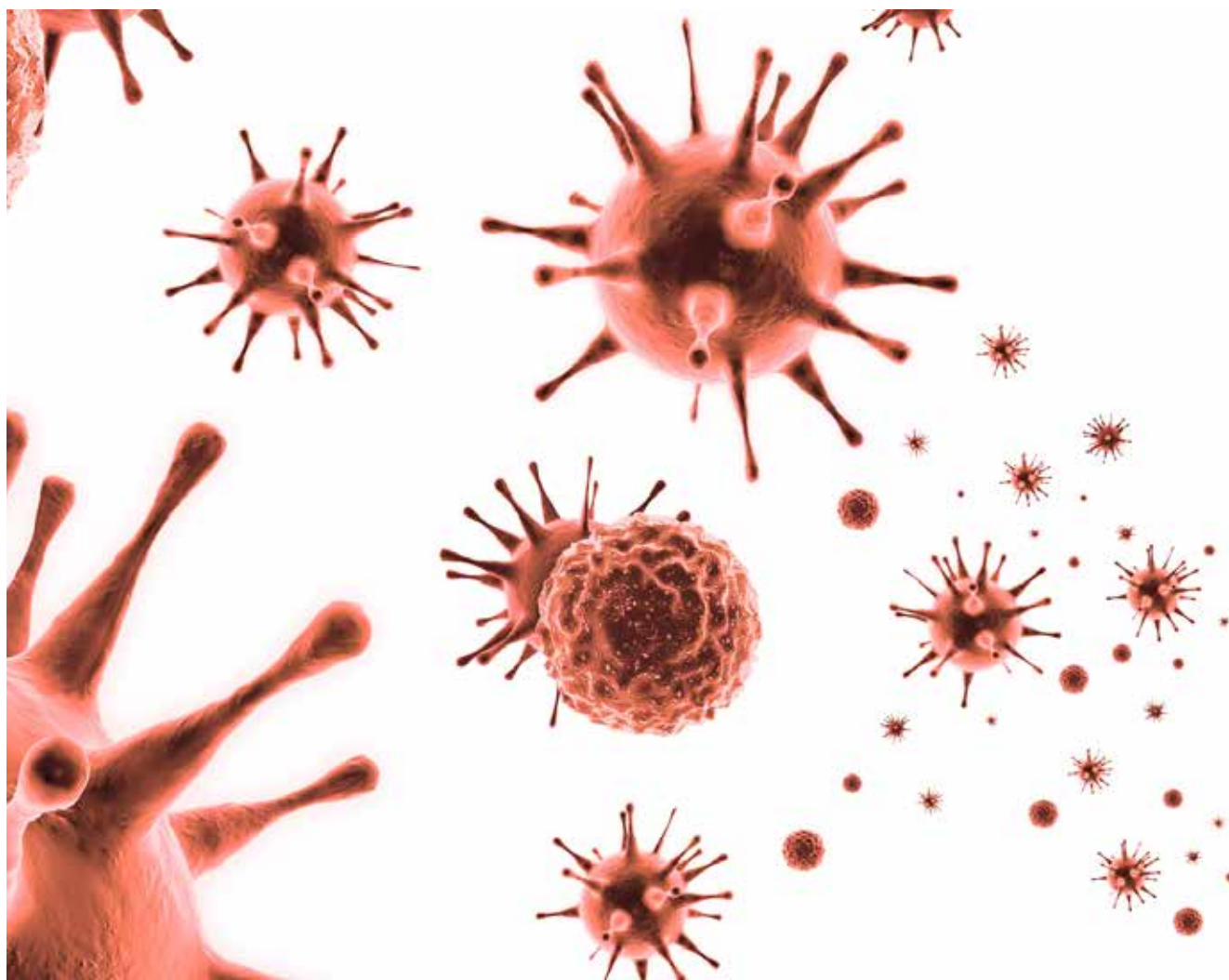# Talking with your workers about preventing coronavirus

Who this guide is for

This guide is aimed at all employers. It explains how you can talk to your workers about preventing coronavirus (COVID-19) in your workplace. It gives guidance on reducing the risks from coronavirus, for example by putting in place social distancing measures, staggering shifts and providing additional handwashing facilities.

The guidance may also be useful to workers and their representatives, and those who are self-employed and work with or near other people.

The law requires all employers to assess the risk of returning to work while the coronavirus pandemic is ongoing and to put steps in place to manage that risk.

A short guide *Working safely during the coronavirus pandemic* provides simple steps you can take to help manage the risk while continuing to run your business: www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/working-safely.

There is more specific guidance for sectors and industries. You can find details at www.gov.uk/workingsafely.

Consulting your workers

You must consult all your workers on health and safety. It is a two-way process, allowing workers to raise concerns and influence decisions on managing health and safety.

In a small business, you might choose to consult your workers directly. Larger businesses may consult through a health and safety representative, chosen by your workers or selected by a trade union. You cannot decide who the representative will be.

There is more information at www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/consult.htm.

This guide is designed to help you consult with workers as one part of putting in place measures to manage the risks of coronavirus in the workplace while continuing to work.

By talking to your workers you can:

● explain the changes you are making;
● get their thoughts and ideas about how to change the workplace to keep people safe and to ensure those changes are workable;
● continue to operate your business safely during the pandemic.

Supporting workers in higher-risk groups

The Public Health England report *Disparities in the risk and outcomes of COVID-19* (www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-review-of-disparities-in-risks-and-outcomes) shows that some groups of people may be at more risk of being infected and/or an adverse outcome if infected.

 The higher-risk groups include those who:

● are older males;
● have a high body mass index (BMI);
● have health conditions such as diabetes;
● are from some Black, Asian or minority ethnicity (BAME) backgrounds.

The full findings can be found in the report.

There are currently no expectations of additional controls for these groups. But make sure your existing controls (social distancing, good hygiene and cleaning, ventilation, supervision etc) are applied stringently.

As an employer, you need to support these individuals/groups in your workforce. You should support them by ensuring that:

● you emphasise the importance of individual and wider workforce engagement, buy-in and cooperation to ensure controls are applied stringently;
● they have individual discussions with their managers around their particular concerns;
● you/they discuss the risk management measures you have put in place to minimise transmission to keep them, and others, safe;
● you explain the controls you will put/already have in place to protect them and other workers.

Other advice

This guide should be used alongside other advice to help you decide on the actions to take. Many other organisations are providing tools and resources to support businesses working safely during the pandemic. You can find out more at: www.GOV.UK/coronavirus.

How to use the guide

The guide covers five areas and suggests questions you can use to discuss managing the risks of coronavirus with your workers when you are doing your risk assessment. Actions can then be taken to make sure your plans are working safely and people have been listened to.

You can hold conversations before returning to work so that plans can be developed and put in place before going back. You could then have further discussions soon after return to make sure the actions are working and are being followed.

You may also decide to repeat the discussions if something changes, for example:

● new guidelines are published;
● lockdown restrictions change;
● plans you put in place don't work as expected, eg if social distancing in welfare facilities isn't working;
● work or tasks change;
● someone in the workplace is diagnosed with coronavirus.

Importantly, you should make sure that there is time available for managers and workers to have these conversations. The guide relies on both managers and workers having an open and honest conversation.

You should listen to what is being said to agree action points and solutions together. The important thing is to start talking and to start planning.

Contents

Social distancing

Employers should ensure that workers are able where possible, to follow Public Health England guidelines on social distancing (www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19).

This is an important way to reduce the risk of coronavirus spreading between people when they are working. Conversations with workers will help you to identify where social distancing will need careful planning and consideration.

Areas and tasks where social distancing is more difficult

- If you share your workplace with others you will need to decide how you can manage this. You should identify areas where you may come into contact with others and decide what plans need to be agreed and put in place social distancing measures.
- If your work involves tasks where you need to be close to customers or others, you need to identify these and plan your social distancing.
- Where equipment and vehicles are shared between workers, think about allocating one piece of equipment per person, or whether you should do something else to keep people safe.
- Where there are tasks that need 2 people and they can't social distance, first see if you can redesign the task so only one person is needed, eg using lifting aids.
- Identify which areas of your work people congregate in, eg rest rooms, smoking shelters, welfare facilities, waiting rooms or meeting rooms.

Changing work and tasks to keep social distancing

- Change or redesign tasks so that they only need one person to complete them or social distancing can be maintained.
- Change when and where people work to reduce numbers of people in work.
- Use markers on floors to help people keep social distance.
- Stagger breaks and start/end times.
- Limit the number of people doing tasks at the same time. This could be limiting the number of people in a work area. If people are going into someone's home eg (for personal care or to do maintenance tasks) ask those who don't need to be there to wait in another room. If this isn't possible, then social distance or follow hygiene procedures.
- Use more than one exit or entry to reduce numbers of people coming together.
- Use 'virtual' ways (online etc) to discuss tasks or meet with customers. If customers do need to come to your workplace, decide how you are going to plan the number and type of visitors. Having timed appointments is a good way of managing this.
- During loading and unloading, drivers should either be in their cabs or a waiting area.
- Where you can, use contactless deliveries so people don't need to get too close.
- Deactivate contractors' passes to stop them coming to your workplace unless it's planned.

Where it isn't possible to keep social distancing

- Reduce face-to-face contact, eg people working back to back.
- To prevent infection, have hand sanitiser in addition to washing facilities and keep work areas clean.

Questions to help plan how you will socially distance

- **In our work where will social distancing be more difficult? What areas or tasks are more likely to increase the risk?**

  o **Think about tasks or parts of work that mean you need close contact with others.**

- **How can we change work and tasks so people can social distance or are separate?**

  o **Think about customers and contractors, as well as employees.**

- **What work or tasks are we unable to do while maintaining social distancing?**

  o **Think about areas of work where you need, or can't avoid, close contact with other people.**

- **What could be put in place to help with any of the issues you have talked about?**

  o **Think about what you can do yourself, and what else could be done by your line manager and your business or organisation.**

Organising your workplace

Organising your workplace to reduce the likelihood that coronavirus can spread is an important part of your risk assessment that will allow you to work safely during the coronavirus pandemic.

Reorganising the workplace

- Look at the flow of work to see if it's possible to reorganise it to remove opportunities for coronavirus to be spread. Where this isn't possible, reduce the chances of it spreading by putting in place social distancing and cleaning measures.
- Move workstations around so people are separated.
- Move chairs and tables in rest areas so people can social distance or are sitting back to back.
- In welfare facilities, close cubicles to limit contact between people.
- In meeting rooms, organise tables and chairs to social distance or remove tables and chairs.
- You will already have measures in place to reduce risks from work tasks. Make sure any changes you make don't make these less effective.

Additional facilities or changes

- Use screens to separate areas where people work or have contact.
- Put markings on floors to show social distances or to show people where to stand.
- Door handles, keypads and turnstiles can be changed to reduce surface contact, eg using automatic door openers, changing touch keypads for contactless ways to get in and out of buildings.
- Provide hand drying facilities – either paper towels or electrical dryers. Empty bins frequently to safely dispose of waste.

Doing something different

- Where possible, allocate one workstation and piece of equipment per person. If this isn't possible, provide cleaning equipment at the workstation so it can be cleaned between uses.
- Provide hand sanitiser and/or washing facilities where people are working so they can clean and sanitise hands as required.
- Think about how workers could be grouped so they routinely work together in groupings or pairings to reduce the amount of contact across different workers.
- Put in place systems such as 'one in, one out' in welfare facilities if it isn't possible to maintain social distancing.
- Leave doors open that can be left open (taking fire safety into consideration) to reduce the need for people to touch door handles.

Questions to help plan how you will organise your workplace

- **Can we reorganise our workplace to reduce the likelihood that coronavirus will spread?**

  - o **Think about where people physically work or complete tasks as well as where they may need to go as part of their work.**

- **Do we need to add or change things in our work to reduce the likelihood of spreading coronavirus?**

  - o **Think about providing extra facilities or change how people use equipment.**

- **Are there some tasks or work that we can't reorganise where we need to do something different?**

  - o **Think about tasks that can be assigned to one person. If this isn't possible, then think about how work groups can be organised so they regularly work together.**

- **What could be put in place to help with any of the issues you have talked about?**

  - o **Think about what you can do yourself, and what else could be done by your line manager and your business or organisation.**

Cleaning and sanitising

Cleaning, sanitising and hygiene procedures for workers and workplaces are some of the main ways to ensure that people are working safely during the coronavirus pandemic.

Getting employees involved in conversations about when and where to clean will make sure you have properly assessed high-contact areas and thought about how you will manage these.

What needs cleaning and sanitising

- Common areas of workplaces are likely to have areas that need cleaning such as door handles, handrails and keypads.
- Cleaning of work equipment should be considered, such as company vehicles, forklift trucks, printers and machinery, to decide what needs cleaning and when.
- If your work takes you to buildings or places that are somebody else's premises, then think about what cleaning or sanitising might need to be done there.
- When delivering, receiving or handling goods you will need to decide what cleaning is needed and talk about how to make sure it's done.

Making cleaning easier and reducing the need to clean

- Keeping surfaces clear of objects makes it easier to clean and reduces the number of things that can become contaminated, eg on work surfaces, in vehicles etc.
- Provide hand drying facilities – either paper towels or electrical dryers. Empty bins frequently to safely dispose of waste.
- Provide hand sanitiser to people when it isn't possible for people to wash their hands straight away.
- Put in place 'clean as you use systems' for areas such as meeting rooms, printers etc, to keep up with cleaning requirements.
- If customers or others need to come to your work, put in place measures to ensure the areas they will go to are clean and cleaned after the visit.

Who will do the cleaning and when?

Decide if the cleaning arrangements you currently have in place are enough to ensure cleaning is done throughout the times you are working.

- If cleaners come to work once a day then you may need to think about what extra cleaning will need to be done during the day.
- You may choose different levels of cleaning for different areas. Deep cleaning once a day and then supplementary cleaning, eg wiping high-contact surfaces throughout the day, might need to be followed.
- 'Clean and sanitise as you go' may need to be put in place for areas such as meeting rooms, printers etc.
- If people can't clean straight after touching surfaces, then provide hand sanitiser.
- When deciding who will do the cleaning you need to provide information and instruction to ensure they know what to clean and how to make sure it's effective. For higher-risk cleaning areas you will need to make sure people know what to do to protect themselves.
- Signs around the workplace can be a good way of letting people know what they need to do to keep it clean and sanitised.

Questions to help plan how you will clean and sanitise during work

- **What areas of the workplace are regularly touched by workers and need cleaning and sanitising?**

  - o **Think about shared areas or equipment and places where people need to regularly touch surfaces for their work.**

  - o **Think about equipment such as vehicles, plant and machinery and places people visit for work.**

- **What can we do to reduce the need to clean or to make cleaning easier and more effective?**

  - o **Think about how you can reduce contact with surfaces or what practical things you can do to make cleaning easier.**

- **Who will do the cleaning?**

  - o **Think about the cleaning arrangements we have in place already. Will they ensure cleaning is done when needed, eg during the day?**

  - o **Think about the information and training of those cleaning – have they already got enough information to be able to do this?**

- **What could be put in place to help with any of the issues you have talked about?**

  - o **Think about what you can do yourself, and what else could be done by your line manager and your business or organisation.**

Information and guidance

Making sure you pass on the correct information and guidance to workers, and other people you deal with, is an important part of ensuring people know how to work safely during the coronavirus pandemic.

Through conversations, workers can provide feedback on what they need to know and the best way to provide them with this information and guidance.

Deciding what information and guidance you need

- Decide what people need to know so they can continue working safely. This could include:
  - o changes to when and where breaks happen;
  - o times people arrive and leave work;
  - o when they need to clean parts of their work areas; and
  - o when they should be washing hands and/or using sanitiser.
- Decide the best way to pass on information and guidance to your workers. Bear in mind any situations where workers are in different buildings or places, as you may need to choose a number of different ways to communicate with them. Think about people who don't have English as their first language or people with learning difficulties, or who are partially sighted or deaf etc.
- People often need to hear messages more than once and in different ways to remember and understand what they need to do. Think about how you can reinforce information and guidance and check that people have understood it and are following it.

Information and guidance for people who aren't your employees

- There will be information and guidance on how to work safely that you need to share with people who are not your employees, for example delivery drivers, customers, contractors or people you share workplaces with. You will need to work out how you can pass on and share relevant information and guidance for these people, for example on how they socially distance, where they wash their hands, and the arrangements for using welfare facilities.
- As well as sharing information and guidance with others who are not your employees, you may also need to get information and guidance from others you work with. For example, before visiting a site confirm what your delivery drivers need to do to work safely when they arrive.
- If you are asking others for information and guidance about what your workers need to do when they visit, then decide how you will get that information to your workers beforehand.

Updating information and guidance

- Over time, it is likely that you will have to adapt and change your plans for working safely during the coronavirus pandemic. You need to make sure you have measures in place to update people as they are adapted and changed.
- You should have already identified ways of sharing information and guidance. Decide if these are enough to update people or if you need to do more. You may find that if there are urgent changes to information and guidance, you need a quicker way of telling people.
- As information and guidance is key to ensuring people are working safely, decide how you are going to make sure that everyone who needs the information gets it.

Questions to help plan how you will share information and guidance

- **What information and guidance do workers need to make sure they understand how to work safely during the pandemic?**

  o **Think about the plans we are putting in place to carry on working safely and what information needs passing on and how.**

- **Who else do we need to share information and guidance with and how?**

  o **Think about people who are not employees such as customers, clients and contractors.**

- **How will people know when information and guidance is updated?**

  o **Think about what may change and why.**

  o **Think about what is already in place to update people and what else we may need to do.**

- **What could be put in place to help with any of the issues we have talked about?**

  o **Think about what you can do yourself, and what else could be done by your line manager and your organisation.**

Wellbeing and support

The pandemic has been a worrying time for everyone and it is important that workers feel supported and listened to. It is crucial that their wellbeing is being looked after while working.

Concerns about returning to work

- Talk through specific concerns.
- Talk about what can be done to help people feel safe. This may include providing information about coronavirus and what people can do to protect themselves.
- Online resources can be used to help support workers, including resources to look after their mental health.
- Talk about how people can continue to have conversations on concerns when they are working so they know they will be listened to and that, if necessary, action will be taken to change plans.
- If people are in the shielded or clinically vulnerable categories, explain what will be done to protect them, eg working from home, doing tasks where social distancing can be followed. This also applies for people who are living with someone in the shielded or clinically vulnerable group.

Restructuring work and working from home

- Agree on the jobs that can be done from home.
- Think about tasks that could be done in another way that means you don't need to go into work, eg customer consultations online, checking in with sites virtually, talking to managers about work that needs to be done using email, phone and conferencing.
- Agree what work equipment will be provided for people working remotely.
- Think about how you will keep in touch with people working remotely, to make sure they feel part of the team and involved.

Suspected cases of coronavirus

- Make sure that all workers know what the current guidelines are about self-isolation if they or someone in their home has symptoms.
- Agree how you will let people at work know that you are self-isolating and make sure that you don't go into work.
- Agree how you will look after someone who falls ill at work. Do you need to isolate them until they can go home? Where will that be? What do you need to do to clean afterwards?
- Decide what support and reassurance needs to be in place for the person who is self-isolating and agree what support and reassurance will be in place for other people in work.

Questions to help plan how you will support employees

- **What are your main concerns about returning to work?**

    o **What are your specific concerns and what can we put in place to reassure you?**

- **How can work be restructured to allow more people to work from home or remotely?**

    o **Think about the tasks you do in your workplace and whether they need to be done in work or if they can be done another way or from home.**

- **What do we need to do if there is a suspected case of coronavirus in our work?**

    o **Think about how people will understand and follow the guidelines for when to self-isolate and what you will do if someone is at work and has symptoms. What support will be needed for the affected person and others they work with?**

- **What could be put in place to help with any of the issues you have talked about?**

    o **Think about what you can do yourself, and what else could be done by your line manager and your business or organisation.**

Helpful resources

HSE guidance on consulting and involving your workers
www.hse.gov.uk/involvement/

BEIS general government guidance on keeping workplace settings open www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/guidance-for-employers-and-businesses-on-coronavirus-covid-19

General Scottish Government guidance including links to sector specific information www.gov.scot/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance/

Welsh Government advice for employers https://gov.wales/your-responsibilities-employer-coronavirus

BEIS sector-specific government guidance www.gov.uk/guidance/social-distancing-in-the-workplace-during-coronavirus-covid-19-sector-guidance

Scottish Government guidance on social distancing in business www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-business-and-social-distancing-guidance/

Welsh Government guidance on taking all reasonable measures to maintain physical distancing in the workplace https://gov.wales/taking-all-reasonable-measures-maintain-physical-distancing-workplace

Defra guidance for food manufacturing premises www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-food-businesses/guidance-for-food-businesses-on-coronavirus-covid-19

Food Standards Scotland guidance for food business operators and their employees www.foodstandards.gov.scot/publications-and-research/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-food-business-operators-and-their-employees

PHE guidance for the public on the health and wellbeing aspects of coronavirus www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-public-on-mental-health-and-wellbeing/guidance-for-the-public-on-the-mental-health-and-wellbeing-aspects-of-coronavirus-covid-19

Guidance for social distancing in educational settings www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-social-distancing-in-education-and-childcare-settings

Further information

HSE's latest news and advice on coronavirus:
www.hse.gov.uk/news/coronavirus.htm

For information about health and safety, or to report inconsistencies or inaccuracies in this guidance, visit www.hse.gov.uk

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This publication is available at:
www.hse.gov.uk/news/working-safely-during-coronavirus-outbreak.htm

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