

Working Safely During Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Workplace Risks

The COVID-19 global pandemic presents employers with a hazard for businesses to consider alongside their existing risks. The following advice provides general recommendations to businesses on how to assess, manage and communicate the COVID-19 risk within their workplace, in order to protect their workers from the virus.



Businesses are well versed at dealing with risks within their workplace and should already have plans and procedures in place to manage them. Workers should not be forced into an unsafe workplace and businesses need to ensure their workers are protected against the COVID-19 virus.

Employers should review and adapt the government guidelines and recommendations relating to COVID-19, to best fit their business, while continuing to adhere to any legal obligations relating to already established health and safety risks.

COVID-19 Workplace Risk Four-Step Process

- Step 1 – Assess the risk of COVID-19
- Step 2 – Manage the risk of COVID-19
- Step 3 - Communicate your risk findings
- Step 4 - Keep updated and review findings

To protect people in your workplace against COVID-19 you should complete a COVID-19 risk assessment. This will identify the potential hazards you face and provide options on how to reduce the risks. This risk assessment must be done in consultation with unions or workers.

Step 1. Assess the Risk of COVID-19

As an employer, you have a legal responsibility to protect your workers from health and safety risks and do everything reasonably practicable to minimise them. To do this, you will need to complete a COVID-19 risk assessment. While you will not be able to fully eliminate the risk of COVID-19, you should be able to reduce the risk to your workers.

The risk assessment process should identify and document:

- The work activities or situations that might cause transmission of the virus
- The people who could be at risk
- How likely it is that people could be exposed
- Ways to remove and/or mitigate the risks of the identified activities or situations

Employers have a duty to consult their employees on health and safety matters, and often the best risk assessments are generated through collaboration between employer and employees. It stands to reason the people who undertake the work, also understand the risks involved and how to work more safely, so by involving them in the process ensures fullness of the risk assessment document. Businesses with less than five employees don't need to document anything on paper, but it may help if they do.



We have prepared a generic workplace COVID-19 risk assessment that you could use as a guide for your own risk assessment planning. We recommend using this to support any changes you have already made or identify further improvements you should make. View the template [here](#).

Step 2. Manage the Risk of COVID-19

Employers have a duty to reduce workplace risk to the lowest reasonably practicable level by taking preventative measures. The considerations below will assist businesses to manage and address the risks of COVID-19 to their activities and ensure business continuity:

- **Create a business impact analysis and business continuity plan**
Identify and quantify your exposure to the potential risks of COVID-19 and define the possible extent and timing of any impacts. Then create an action plan in response to the identified scenarios.
- **Review the supply chain**
Investigate the parts of your supply chain which either have or may be disrupted by the COVID-19 virus. Then prepare alternate plans and suppliers.
- **Consider flexible working**
Think about the resources and technical requirements needed for employees to work from home or during self-isolation. Consider the implications should employees need to also care for others (for example with school closures).
- **Keep everyone informed**
Customers, suppliers and especially employees may feel uncertain and worried about the implications of COVID-19 on them. Communicate your approach in a clear and concise way and ensure employees have access to mental health and wellbeing resources.



The following good practice recommendations, provides practical guidance for employers to implement. You should also consider specific advice that has been produced for your sector, for example by trade associations or trade unions.

Checklist to evaluate your business' preparedness:

- ☐ Get up to date contact numbers and emergency details for all employees.
- ☐ Ensure managers are clear on relevant processes and procedures (e.g. sickness reporting, sick pay, if an employee is suspected of being infected).
- ☐ Ensure everyone knows the symptoms of COVID-19 and what to do if someone becomes unwell in the workplace.
- ☐ Ensure those with symptoms are not present on the premises.
- ☐ Evaluate where employees should undertake work activities (whether from home, hybrid working or in an office environment), particularly those in defined vulnerable groups.
- ☐ Consider implementing social distancing requirements.
- ☐ Businesses should ensure they comply with HSE guidance and provide adequate ventilation in buildings and office/rooms.
- ☐ Regularly clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that are touched frequently.
- ☐ Provide places to wash hands with soap and water, or hand sanitiser if soap and water is unavailable and remind employees to wash their hands for 20 seconds regularly.
- ☐ Provide tissues and remind workers to catch coughs and sneezes in them, before disposing of them hygienically.
- ☐ Businesses should consider additional protection, such as:
 - Whether the task or activity needs to continue for the business to operate
 - Reducing the number of workers on site at any one time
 - Relocating workers to other areas or tasks
 - Redesigning processes to facilitate social distancing
 - Increasing the frequency of hand washing and surface cleaning
 - Keeping the activity time as short as possible
 - Using screens or barriers to separate people
 - Using technology such as teleconferencing instead of face-to-face meetings
 - 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



Step 3. Communicate Your Risk Findings

You should consult and share your COVID-19 risk assessment findings with your employees. By communicating this information with your workers, it will ensure:

- They fully understand the changes planned for the workplace
- They know what is expected of them
- You should be able to continue to operate safely during the pandemic
- You are providing them with the best chance of protection
- They feel valued and you care about their health and well-being

You should also consider publishing a notice on your website to inform others that you have followed the COVID-19 guidance provided.

Step 4. Keep Updated and Review Findings

It is important during these uncertain times that businesses keep up to date with the latest COVID-19 guidance and follow the advice being offered by each country, based on medical and scientific evidence.

Use the links below for up to date information:

- [England](#)
- [Scotland](#)
- [Wales](#)
- [Northern Ireland](#)
- [Republic of Ireland](#)

You should also regularly review your risk assessment to make sure it continues to meet all requirements and complies with health and safety law.



Enforcement and penalties

Based on regulations set in each country in the UK, businesses should take all reasonable measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. If they are found to breach the regulations in their country, they can be subject to varying degrees of penalties, such as:

- Ceasing of business activity
- Restrictions or requirements on businesses
- Improvement and prohibition notices
- Fixed penalty notices
- Prosecution
- Fines

Report a health and safety issue

If you see something in a workplace that you think is breaking health and safety law and is likely to cause serious harm, you can report it. You can raise your concerns by contacting:

- Your workplace health and safety employee representative
- Your trade union if you have one
- The HSE in England, Scotland and Wales
 - [Online form](#)
 - 0300 790 6787 (lines open Mon – Fri 8:30am to 5pm)
- The HSENI in Northern Ireland
 - mail@hse.gov.uk
 - [online form](#)

Sources and useful references.

- 1 GOV-UK - working safely during coronavirus (COVID-19)
www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19
- 2 GOV-UK - coronavirus (COVID-19) support
www.gov.uk/coronavirus
- 3 Scottish Government – coronavirus (COVID-19) support
www.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/
- 4 Business Gateway – coronavirus business support across Scotland
www.findbusinesssupport.gov.scot/coronavirus-advice
- 5 Welsh Government – coronavirus (COVID-19) support
www.gov.wales/coronavirus
- 6 Northern Ireland Executive
www.northernireland.gov.uk/
- 7 NIDirect Government Services – coronavirus (COVID-19) support
www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/coronavirus-covid-19