

Getting Your Business Covid Secure Guidance from Quest

Office Environment

What is Covid-19?

Covid-19 is a type of Corona Virus which infects the respiratory system of those catching it, causing respiratory problems in many cases, and in some hospitalisation and even fatalities although most fatal cases have been attributed to those who have also had underlying health conditions making their immune system weak and more vulnerable to succumbing to the virus.

The government decided back in March to instigate a lockdown in the UK for all but some essential businesses to reduce the spread of the virus.

So where are we at now?






Week beginning 11th May the Prime Minister had announced that there would be a gradual easing of the lockdown restrictions, and advising that those businesses who are able to work from home should continue to do so, however those who cannot should now be encouraged back to work, with the exception of some businesses such as non-essential retail and the hospitality industry. This guide breaks down some of the steps required based on current government guidelines to make your business "Covid Secure". The PM also stressed in his announcement that should transmission begin to escalate again there may be a requirement to introduce stricter controls once more.

You need to be sure government guidelines permit your business to open – the full breakdown of this is [HERE](#)

Why do I need to do this?

The highly contagious nature to covid-19 means that we must put steps in place to control the virus, as an employer you have a duty to your people under section 2 and to others under section 3 of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 to so far as is reasonably practicable protect employees from harm and to not allow harm to be caused to others by omitting to do something.

Key Points

 Conduct a Suitable & Sufficient Risk Assessment	 Those with symptoms must self-isolate.
 Identify those who are especially at risk.	 Do not go into the office if you are able to work from home.
 Share the significant findings of the risk assessment, and implement a safe system.	 Don't wear masks needlessly.
 Implement social distancing.	 Avoid touching your face.
 Ensure adequate hygiene facilities are available.	 Non-essential deliveries should be avoided, including personal items delivered to the workplace.
 Communicate with staff to ensure they know what action to take if they do develop symptoms.	 Non-essential visitors should not be permitted.
 Ensure a good hygiene system is in place.	
 Ensure statutory equipment inspection / maintenance has taken place and is up to date.	
 You may wish to display the UK Government's poster to demonstrate your compliance to the rules: HERE	

We have summarised some of the requirements for your easy reference below, however for full information follow this [LINK](#) to the full government advice for office environments.

1. Risk Assessment

Section 3 of the **Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999** requires a risk assessment to be suitable and sufficient and take account of the risks faced by people at work, and that of others in the workplace but are not employees (visitors, suppliers, customers etc).

In the context of Covid-19, as with all risk assessments we look at:
What is the risk, Who is at risk, How will they be harmed and; What to do about it.

What is the risk?

This one is simple, transmission of Covid-19 leading to illness.

Who is at risk?

Here we need to look at specific people or groups of people, some examples of this will be:
Employees as a whole

Those undertaking certain roles (where social distancing is difficult for instance or healthcare workers)

Visitors (you are unlikely to be aware of their health condition)

Older people; as they have been identified by government as higher risk.

Those identified as vulnerable through underlying / existing health conditions / those advised to shield.

How will they be harmed?

For example:

Coming into contact with an infected person;

Failure to maintain social distance;

Cross contamination from surfaces / poor hygiene;

Inadequate hand hygiene;

What to do about it

These are the actions you will be taking to control / mitigate the risk and cover things like for example, social distancing procedures, how desks will be laid out, how welfare facilities will be managed, how transport will work, what the process is for visitors / contractors.

There is an example Risk Assessment for Coronavirus here to give some inspiration:

HAZARD	Risk/HARM	PERSONS AT RISK	EXISTING CONTROL MEASURES	ADDITIONAL CONTROLS REQUIRED	ACTION COMPLETED
COVID-19 Coronavirus	Transmission of Covid-19 leading to illness.	<p>Staff Visitors Cleaners Contractors Drivers</p> <p>Vulnerable categories such as those over 60yrs of age, pregnant women or those with underlying health conditions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of and frequent use of handwashing facilities – in line with government advice. • Use of electric dryer or paper towels to dry hands. • Availability of and use of hand sanitisation creams after washing hands. • Cleaning/Disinfecting premises • Social Distancing. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Working from home. - Video link used instead of face of face meetings. <p>Symptoms of COVID-19 Monitoring</p> <p>Those over the age of 60 or with underlying health conditions sent home as a precautionary measure.</p>	<p>Provide hand sanitiser in Reception area and in all working areas.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish rigorous policy to monitor and enforce hygiene rules. • Appointment of person to make frequent hygiene inspections throughout the site • Introduce new cleaning/disinfecting regime to sanitise work surfaces and constantly used objects such as door handles, light switches. • Provide and make available disinfecting solution, to clean work surfaces and work tools such as PC's, keyboards, mouse. • Introduce rules on cleaning of printers after use, and make available hand sanitiser near printers. • Consider redesigning work schedules/times/shift to minimise the number of people on site at any one time. • Wherever possible avoid 'hot-desking' to minimise risk of spreading the virus. • Prohibit the sharing of work tools and equipment such as pens, PC's and accessories • Consider redesigning pedestrian walkways (where possible) to minimise contact. • Special attention to be paid with regards to canteen/kitchen area, to avoid contact. • Appoint a person to monitor/enforce social distancing policy at work. • Staff should avoid using public transport to get into work/home. • Vehicles should not be shared where social distancing cannot be maintained 	

				<p>Where a risk assessment identifies use of gloves or masks, these shall be made available, and staff to be trained on the correct and safe use.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff to be reminded that wearing of gloves/masks is not a substitute for good personal hygiene. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If anyone becomes ill and demonstrates a continuous cough or a high temperature in the workplace, shall be sent home immediately. • Management to maintain regular contact with staff during these times. • If a member of staff or a recent visitor on our premises has been diagnosed with the virus, management shall immediately liaise with Public Health England, and seek their advice 	
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Legionella

One thing that may not immediately come to mind but which you should consider is [Legionella](#). Employers have a duty to identify and control risks associated with it, and there is an increased risk of legionella becoming a problem following the lockdown, even if you remained open in some capacity the potential lower occupancy means water may have stagnated in pipes, that coupled with warmer temperatures can easily create a problem which poses a risk of [Legionnaires Disease](#). This should be looked at as part of the risk assessment process too.

- Consider flushing any seldom used water outlets for a couple of minutes,
- Legionnaires is harmful if breathed in and so ensure any showers or spray heads you have on site are dismantled and cleaned properly as due to their nature, they are an increased risk as they create an “aerosol” or “mist” effect which is easily breathed in.

This risk should be looked at as part of your site risk assessments (not just covid 19 related) – the HSE’s Approved Code of Practice is [HERE](#), get in touch if you need support with this.

Communication

Communication is key, and you must communicate with your people so they know what is expected of them. An important part of this process is consultation with them over how you can keep them safe, indeed this is a legal requirement under **The Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations 1996, regulation 3** which requires employers to consult their employees on matters affecting their health and safety at work.

The way the communication element is managed is individual to each business, however some ideas how you can do this is:

- Through team meetings
- Noticeboards
- Email Communications
- Employee Forums
- Clear Signage
- Markings / Barriers
- Safe Systems of Work

The government have provided a poster [HERE](#) you can print and display at your workplace to demonstrate to employees and visitors that you are committed to following the government advice which will increase confidence in your organisation by your people and guests.

So we know what the risk is, lets look at specifics with people.

Current government advice is for you to work from home where possible, and where this is not possible you may go into work, but there are some exceptions and particular groups to think about:

Shielding or Clinically Vulnerable People

The government has advised certain people considered vulnerable to “shield” due to their health putting them at greater risk should they become infected by the virus, this means them not leaving their home at all while it is considered a risk to them, this can affect your business in a couple of ways:

1. Those vulnerable “shielding” employees should not be expected to go against government advice in order to attend work, homeworking should be utilised here.
2. Those who are in the same household as a shielding person clearly are a risk to them should they pass the virus on after being exposed, extra consideration should be given to making arrangements for them to work from home as far as possible to reduce that risk from the work environment.
3. Where it is not possible to stick to this rule, government guidelines allow you to consider furloughing them if they meet the other eligibility criteria.



Those Self Isolating

An employee who has symptoms, or someone in their household has symptoms currently is required to self-isolate in line with government guidelines, which can be found [HERE](#). Consideration could be given to using Furlough here depending on the circumstances (however be aware there is a 3-week minimum period if using furlough. The employee would provide an "isolation note" which is available online from the NHS 111 service which serves the purpose of a "fit note" or a "sick note" as it used to be called. Normal sick procedures apply, guidance can be found [HERE](#) on eligibility / qualifying periods.

Where working from home is possible, consider the following:

As long as its temporary the HSE says you **don't necessarily need to carry out a full DSE assessment**, but should make clear the importance of good posture and a suitable workspace as well as the following:

- ✓ breaking up long spells of DSE work with rest breaks (at least 5 minutes every hour) or changes in activity
- ✓ avoiding awkward, static postures by regularly changing position
- ✓ getting up and moving or doing stretching exercises
- ✓ avoiding eye fatigue by changing focus or blinking from time to time

- ✓ If small equipment like monitor risers, wrist rests and keyboards, and even a monitor (for the laptop users) could all be reasonable to allow if it's going to be slightly longer term (as there is a very good chance this will be) – just keep a spreadsheet of who has taken what so you can follow it up to ensure it comes back to its rightful place.

- ✗ Generally unless there is a specific need for a specialist chair – it isn't necessary to move large furniture for the sake of a temporary period working from home.

- ✓ Another thing to consider is the lone working element and maintaining contact – perhaps a conference / skype call with your team just to check in and make them feel included and not forgotten about.)

- ✓ We must consider the Stress / General Mental Health element; it is important to keep in touch and understand how to identify a potential problem and support the employee – admittedly more difficult when remote, but being cut off from the rest of the workplace can be detrimental to some – the HSE have a page dedicated to it here: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/signs.htm>

It isn't always possible for everyone to work from home, specialist equipment or resources may be at the place of work that simply means you cannot work from home. In this situation there are many areas to consider:

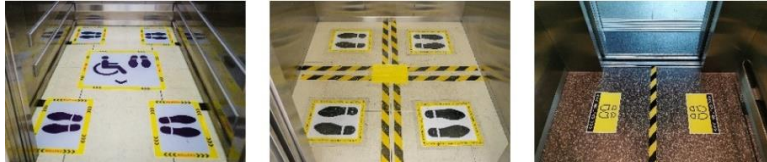
Arrival at work / Leaving Work

- ✓ Stagger start & finish times where possible
- ✓ Mark working entrances out to help maintain social distance.
- ✓ Put arrangements in place for structured arrivals and clocking in where relevant.
- ✓ Where communal transport is provided and is unavoidable to use, leaving a seat free in between each person can help to keep a distance.
- ✓ Wash hands upon arrival and before leaving.
- ✓ Temperature checks of employees could be a consideration in some workplaces, identifying those who show a temperature of around 38 degrees C, and although not a confirmation of them having the virus, is a good indicator which may help identify those who could potentially pose a risk of transmission.
- ✓ A designated person should complete these checks, ideally keeping a safe distance and or employing use of suitable PPE.
- ✓ Consent should be gained from the employee to take their temperature – refusal could be considered a breach of **S7 of the H&S at Work etc Act 1974** for employees to co-operate with their employer on matters of H&S.

- ✗ Those with symptoms or who share a household with someone who has should not enter the workplace. (full guidance on symptoms [HERE](#))
- ✗ Employees should avoid car sharing.
- ✗ Where possible travelling to work should avoid public transport.

Social distancing

- ✓ You should designate an area which you could use for isolation should a suspected case be discovered at your premises, and ensure you know what to do afterwards – guidance [HERE](#). The isolation area should contain where possible:
 - Tissues
 - Antibacterial Wipes
 - Hand Gel
 - Masks
- ✓ Have clear signage in place reminding people of the need to maintain social distance, these are widely available.
- ✓ Where appropriate floor markings should be used with either tape, paint, chalk or other method clearly keeping people apart.



Person Lift Social Distancing - Images Courtesy of Gov.uk

- ✓ Where social distancing is difficult, use of screens should be considered, especially at reception desks where unknown visitors may attend.
- ✓ Consider dividing your workforce up into “cohorts” who will stick together during the working day, and have no contact with others – the idea being this reduces the risk further should one person of the cohort develop symptoms it is likely where contact is unavoidable within their cohort, only they will be effected and not the rest of the workplace which helps reduce the risk of wider transmission.
- ✗ Avoid face to face meetings, if they must take place, they should be in an outside area where facilities (and the weather!) allows – if indoors a well ventilated area should be used and keep attendees to a minimum – always consider an alternative like video conferencing where this is possible to reduce the contact.
- ✗ Avoid hot desking.
- ✗ Non-essential visitors / deliveries to site should be avoided this is an important step to reduce contamination being brought in, you should also maintain a record of visitors if you don't already to assist with contact tracing should it be required.
- ✗ Where offices are laid out in open plan format, employees should not sit too close to one another, where appropriate you may need to designate every other desk in a row as out of use as illustrated below.



Welfare Facilities

- ✓ Break / rest areas need to be arranged as such that social distancing can be maintained.
 - Separate tables would be ideal, but we recognise this isn't always possible, but simple steps like restricting seating next to another to reduce contact.
 - Encourage use of outdoor break areas where possible, consider setting one up if nothing currently exists.
 - Stagger break-times to reduce numbers congregating at the same time is one possible measure.
 - You may also where feasible consider a meeting room / other area being used as a temporary rest area at lunch times to help spread people out.
 - Clearly mark the area where communal equipment (kettles, toaster, fridges etc) is used, and ensure it is restricted to one person at a time (unless of course the equipment is far enough away to keep social distancing (like on the opposite side of the room).
- ✓ Remember hygiene -always washing hands before entering this area.
- ✓ Ensure wipes are provided and employees trained to wipe down handles / equipment after use.
- ✓ Use of lavatories should ideally be restricted to one person at a time – clear signage to attach to the door should be provided to each employee as personal issue so people know if someone is already in there.
- ✓ Antibacterial wipes should be provided to enable surfaces to be cleaned after use.

Moving Around

- ✓ Provide appropriate hand sanitiser gel stations at strategic locations around the site, particularly when moving from one area to another.

- ✓ Where you share a building with another, a collaborative approach should be taken to ensure all occupants adhere to the rules and there is no contradiction of each other businesses procedures.
- ✓ Try where possible to introduce a one-way system in the office (unless this would cause further problems).
- ✓ Where the fire risk assessment allows, consider non fire doors being pinned open to increase ventilation and reduce door handle contact. Fire door self-closing mechanisms could also be considered to allow these to be opened too – but this needs reviewing as part of your fire risk assessment and an agreed system to close them in the event of a fire.
- ✗ Movement from one area to another should be restricted where possible, utilising phone and email facilities (even in the same office) to reduce contact between people.

Hygiene / Cleaning

- ✓ Prior to opening a thorough deep clean should take place.
 - There is strict guidance on cleaning an area where a known or suspected case of COVID-19 has been present – this is quite detailed and can be found [HERE](#).
- ✓ Soap and running water must be provided and regular handwashing encouraged.
- ✓ Provision of anti-bacterial surface wipes, or sprays and disposable wiping material (blue roll / paper towel for example?) – ensure employees receive some training on doing this effectively and keep their workspace clean.
- ✓ Wash your hands before touching communal office equipment like photocopiers / laminators/ franking machines, and they must be thoroughly wiped down before another user touches them.
- ✓ Regular cleaning of high contact frequency such as door handles, taps, water coolers, phones, desks, IT equipment.
- ✓ A process for goods / post deliveries should be in place – either quarantining goods for 72 hours or disinfecting with cleaning products (PPE should be a consideration here as part of your risk assessment).
- ✗ Employees must not leave their personal items around, store away in their locker / other personal storage area.

Masks / RPE Equipment with a rated particle filter.

The government advice at present is that masks worn as part of the normal activities of the business (NON Covid related) should continue as normal, this for example would be a dust mask to protect against contaminants generated by the work activity like sawdust, silica dust etc etc.



Current guidance says that use of masks as a precautionary measure purely for Covid-19 (other than in some specific places like hospitals or care settings and some others) should be discouraged however, should employees choose to wear one employers should be supportive.

Your risk assessment will determine situations where PPE may be required, and in this situation, you must provide it.

Remember training on donning and doffing masks, ensure employees know they need to be clean shaven for this type of mask to be effective, ensure they wash their hands before donning it and avoid touching their face / the mask.

“Non-Rated” Cloth Face Coverings

Where there is a case of being unable to maintain social distance (a 2 person lift for instance, or a first aid requirement) face coverings should be provided for use, although offering limited protection to the wearer, PHE say that it helps to reduce risk of transmission from the wearer; so both people involved should wear one to protect each other. The key point here is that they offer very little or no protection to the wearer unless they have been rated as such.

They come in many shapes and sizes, often just made from cloth material, and even a scarf, the UK Government has put out guidance on making your own should you wish to do so, [HERE](#).



The HSE guidance on PPE relating to Covid-19 is [HERE](#)

Note: This guide provides an outline of some practical steps you could take to comply with being “Covid-Secure”, it does not constitute a risk assessment or exhaustive list of controls individual to your business.