

Key points for employers in the UK Government's COVID-19 Recovery Strategy

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Key Points for Employers in the UK Government's COVID-19 Recovery Strategy

On 11 May 2020 the Government published "Our Plan to Rebuild: the UK Government's COVID-19 Recovery Strategy" (the Recovery Strategy). The Recovery Strategy sets out the Government's roadmap for a phased exit from the lockdown restrictions in England. The devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and

Northern Ireland will make their own assessments about lifting lockdown measures. Of particular importance to employers is the timetable for getting certain workers back to work and the health and safety measures that must be adopted.

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BDBF is currently advising many employers and employees on the challenges presented by the coronavirus. If you or your business needs advice on furlough or other coronavirus-related matter please contact Amanda Steadman (amandasteadman@bdbf.co.uk) or your usual BDBF contact.

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What is the Recovery Strategy?

The key theme of the Recovery Strategy is that there will be no quick return to normality and working life will be different for the foreseeable future. The Government's overriding priority is to save lives and, therefore, safety measures remain paramount.

At the beginning of the pandemic, the reproduction number of the virus (the **R number**) was between 2.7 and 3, meaning each infected person passed the virus to nearly three other people on average. Phase one of the strategy for dealing with the virus was to introduce stringent lockdown measures to help reduce the R number and alleviate pressure on the NHS. The lockdown measures have caused the R number to drop between 0.5 and 0.9, meaning the number of infected people is falling and the restrictions can now be adjusted.

However, modelling suggests that relaxing all lockdown measures would lead to a resurgence of the virus and a second wave of infection that could be larger than the first. Therefore, phase two of the strategy sets out a road map for the gradual easing of some elements of the lockdown restrictions. The restrictions are to be replaced by "smarter controls", reflecting the level of risk at a given point in time. These smarter controls will be developed and announced over the coming weeks and months and may be rolled out in different regions of England at different times depending on the levels of infection. Importantly, if the R number tips above 1 then stringent lockdown measures will be re-imposed, possibly at short notice.

Phase three of the strategy will be to lift the restrictions altogether. However, it is said this will only be possible when the Government has developed, trialled, manufactured and distributed reliable treatments or vaccines. No time frame is given, save that it is said that a vaccine "may not be developed for a long time (or even ever)" and that effective treatments may be found either "imminently" or "not for a long time". Until then, we will remain in phase two.

What does phase two mean for employers?

Phase two is based around a staged easing of restrictions, with dates assigned to each stage. However, if the R number increases, it's likely that the lifting of some or all of the restrictions will be delayed. Bearing this in mind, what does the roadmap to lifting the restrictions have in store for employers?

Step 1 - some workers may return to work from 13 May 2020

Workers who cannot work from home are told to return to work if their workplace is open. The current list of businesses and venues that must remain closed to the public is set out [here](#) and includes all non-essential retail shops and hospitality businesses. Where workers are returning to work, they