

## **New COVID-19 health and safety guidelines for offices and contact centres**

**Following publication of its COVID-19 Recovery Strategy, the Government has published COVID-19 Secure Guidelines setting out the health and safety measures to be adopted in different types of workplaces. In this briefing, we highlight the core objectives for office-based employers. The full guidelines list the practical steps that employers will usually need to take to achieve these objectives.**

### **Introduction**

The detailed new [guidelines](#) are designed to provide a practical framework for employers to think about what they need to do to continue, or restart, office or contact centre operations. Each business will need to translate the guidelines into a set of specific actions to take. These actions will, to some extent, turn on the nature, size and type of the business and how it is organised, operated, managed and regulated.

The guidelines highlight that no-one is obliged to work in an unsafe environment. If workers have concerns, they are entitled to raise these with the Health and Safety Executive (**HSE**). The HSE has the power to take a range of actions to improve control of workplace risks, from providing advice to issuing enforcement notices.

The guidelines are non-statutory and supplement binding legal obligations on employers regarding health and safety and employment. Where relevant, they should be considered alongside any additional guidance issued by the devolved administrations in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

### **Thinking about and managing risk**

- Conduct an assessment of the risks posed by COVID-19 as soon as possible.
- Consult with an employee or trade union health and safety representative about workplace risks.
- Share the results of the risk assessment with the workforce and consider publishing it on your website (and it is stated that all employers with over 50 employees are expected to do this).
- Take action to reduce identified risks to the lowest reasonably practicable level by taking preventative measures in order of priority.
- Display an official [notice](#) in the workplace to demonstrate compliance with these guidelines.

### **Who should go to work?**

- Everyone should work from home, unless they cannot work from home.
- Keep in touch with homeworkers and monitor their wellbeing
- Protect clinically vulnerable and clinically extremely vulnerable workers. If a clinically vulnerable worker cannot work from home (in their role or an alternative role) then they should be offered the safest available role in the workplace.
- Ensure that those who need to self-isolate (or who live with someone who is self-isolating) do not attend work.
- Treat everyone in the workplace equally and be mindful of the particular needs of different groups of workers (e.g. disabled or pregnant workers).

**Social distancing at work**

- Maintain two metre social distancing wherever possible, including upon arrival and departure from work and ensure handwashing upon arrival at work (or provide access to hand sanitiser if not possible).
- Maintain two metre social distancing between individuals wherever possible when they are moving around the workplace, at their workstations and using common areas.
- Avoid face-to-face meetings wherever possible and maintain two metre social distancing in essential meetings.
- Social distancing does not need to be maintained if there is an emergency such as an accident or fire.

**Managing customers, visitors and contractors**

- Minimise the number of unnecessary visitors to the office.
- Make sure visitors understand what the need to do to maintain safety (e.g. by using signs in the premises and providing information by email and/or on your website).

**Cleaning the workplace**

- Before reopening make sure that any site that has been closed, or partially operated, is clean and ready to restart.
- Keep the workplace clean, especially surfaces touched by multiple people.
- Help everyone keep good hygiene throughout the working day.
- Minimise the risk of transmission in changing rooms and showers (if any).
- Reduce transmission through contact with objects and/or vehicles entering the workplace from outside.

**PPE and face coverings**

- Don't encourage the precautionary use of PPE to protect against COVID-19 outside of clinical settings.
- Wearing a simple face covering is optional and not required by law. However, if a worker chooses to wear one, employers should provide advice on how to use them safely.

**Workforce management**

- Change the way work is organised to create distinct groups and reduce the number of contacts each worker has.
- Avoid unnecessary work travel and keep people safe if they need to travel between locations.
- Help workers making deliveries outside the workplace maintain social distancing and hygiene practices.
- Make sure all workers understand the COVID-19 related safety procedures through consultation with representatives, written communications and training prior to their return to work.
- Make sure all workers are kept up to date with how safety measures are being implemented or changed.

**Inbound and outbound goods**

- Maintain social distancing and avoid surface transmission when goods enter and leave the workplace.

**BDBF is currently advising many employers on the challenges presented by the coronavirus. If you or your business needs advice on any coronavirus-related matter please contact Amanda Steadman ([amandasteadman@bdbf.co.uk](mailto:amandasteadman@bdbf.co.uk)) or your usual BDBF contact.**