



# Returning to work during and after COVID-19

An employer's guide



## Disclaimer

This guide was updated on the 28th of July 2020. We have put this guide together following Government advice and other information from reputable sources but cannot guarantee that the information follows the latest advice by the time you are reading this. We recommend that you follow Government advice as much as possible via the [gov.uk website](#)<sup>1</sup>. We will offer guidance for businesses operating within **England** through this guide, for those anywhere else in the UK, please see guidance for [Wales](#)<sup>2</sup>, [Scotland](#)<sup>3</sup>, and [Northern Ireland](#)<sup>4</sup>.

## Introduction

While some of us have started returning to the workplace, many of us are still unsure of when we will be returning and are continuing to work from home. The Government are periodically reviewing the guidance and restrictions on businesses. We advise that you continue to follow Government advice at all times in order to avoid a potential outbreak at your workplace.

Many of our clients have been [using iHASCO to adapt to remote working](#)<sup>5</sup> and using this time to get staff up to speed with working at home safely and/or other compliance training. But as the restrictions are slowly lifted and businesses are allowed to resume some normal working practices, you will need to consider some possible changes to workplaces to keep employees safe. We have provided six steps to help you work towards compliance with the social distancing measures and other advice from the Government.

## Preparing your workplace

You should carry out a [risk assessment\(s\)](#)<sup>6</sup> of your workplace prior to letting employees come back into the workplace. You should involve members of your management team and other employees in this process. You will be evaluating what safeguarding measures may need to be implemented to prevent harm to your employees and or visitors to the premises.

For many people, going back to work is a positive and exciting time - a step towards regaining a sense of normality, but for others, it can be daunting. There's no right or wrong way to feel, and it's how the return is handled that can make all the difference, both to the employee and your organisation. By involving some of your employees in your risk assessment, you might be able to ease some of the concerns employees have about returning to the workplace and their safety.

Before your workplace is allowed to open or function again, you might be required to deep clean the whole building. In fact, depending on your kind of workplace, you might be required to do this regularly, as well as some other health and safety measures.

## Communicating with employees

After the workplace itself is ready for the employee's return, you should contact your employees about the new systems you have in place before they return to the building. Employers should create a plan to determine which employees will return to work and when. You may want to consider:

- Who the business needs back in the workplace e.g. the management team first, then team leaders, etc.
- The employees that are considered higher risk and if employees are living with someone who is considered a high-risk individual.
- Which employees could easily continue to work from home (The Government are advising that if you can continue to work from home then you absolutely should).

Once you have decided in which order or which employees are going to be returning to work, you should make sure employees are aware of the plan. You should also update them if this plan changes for any reason. For those employees who are being advised to stay at home (regardless of the reason), they should be appropriately supported just like those in the workplace.

## Social distancing at work

This will involve reducing contact with people as much as is possible in your day to day tasks. Where possible, employees should aim to work from home. However, for those who are not able to work from home and return to the workplace in line with government guidance, should follow any social distancing measures that are put in place. Employers need to make sure any employee returning to the workplace is aware of these measures which may include:

- Keeping a '1 metre plus' distance from people (where 2 metres is not possible)
- While people from several households can meet in groups of up to six. Online meetings instead of physical ones are still encouraged
- Altering seating arrangements for employees to ensure the working distances are adhered to, this could mean working back to back or side to side instead of facing one another
- Using cashless payment methods, e.g. using contactless card payments or prepaying online
- On top of the above, try to transfer paperwork electronically to reduce the need for multiple people coming into contact with it
- Staggering the work hours/patterns/breaks to ensure there are no mass gatherings of employees

- Restricting the number of employees and/or customers into your workplace, or implementing a one-way system in the workplace to reduce crossovers
- Government advice states - people should wear a face-covering on public transport
- Depending on the workplace, employees may also be encouraged in enclosed workspaces where social distancing is not always possible

## Limit visitors and access to the building

Until we are told otherwise from the Government, you should be limiting the number of visitors/contractors to your workplace. You might want to consider only allowing visitors that are critical to the business into your workplace. These critical visitors/contractors may include;

- Delivery or collection services
- Contractors that may be carrying out statutory repairs and services e.g. fire systems
- Contractors that may be carrying out emergency works
- Members of the public purchasing goods

For those working in public-facing industries, where allowing visitors/contractors into your workplace is unavoidable, you might want to consider:

- Drop off and collection points
- Different types of entry and exit points (to prevent cross-contamination)
- You may want to install plastic shields where employees are regularly interacting with the public (these should be cleaned regularly)
- Restricting the number of people on your premises at one time
- Creating one way systems to restrict the amount of cross over people have

## Good levels of hygiene

In order to help minimise the spread of COVID-19, employers need to ensure they have a full understanding of infection prevention and control methods. This might include regular deep cleans of your premises, regular cleaning and making sure that all employees are up to date on good hygiene measures - it is useful to provide them with a resource with all of this on. Good hygiene measures may include:

- Installing hand sanitiser (60% alcohol) dispensers in the business
- Putting disinfectant sprays and wipes near entrances and exits, kitchens, offices, anywhere where you may interact with customers and colleagues
- Installing no-touch or low touch doors or switches
- Provide staff with the tools to keep their own workspaces clean to encourage similar practices in the rest of the workplace
- Provide staff with personal tools so nothing is shared
- Conduct meetings online to reduce the need for personal interaction
- Providing employees with PPE

## Staff (personal) hygiene

As an employee, you are also responsible for taking care of your health and safety at work, as well as taking due care for other people's health and safety. You can reduce the risk of spreading infection by maintaining a high standard of personal health and hygiene. In relation to COVID-19, personal hygiene can be broken down into 2 main factors - hand hygiene and respiratory hygiene.

## Hand hygiene

Ensure that you are regularly washing your hands and using hand sanitiser (must be 60% alcohol). The key steps in handwashing are:

1. Use clean, hot, running water and soap - preferably antibacterial liquid soap from a dispenser - as soap bars can harbour germs.
2. Wet your hands thoroughly.
3. Rub soap into your palms to form a lather.
4. Clean your hands for 20 to 30 seconds. Go between your right and left hand for each of these areas - the backs, between your fingers, your thumbs and your wrists. Remember to check and clean your fingernails too.
5. Then rinse the soap off with clean, hot, running water.
6. Turn the tap off with a disposable hand towel to avoid re-contaminating your hands.
7. Dry your hands thoroughly using a second disposable hand towel or a hand dryer.
8. Make sure you DRY your hands properly - it's easier for harmful bacteria to spread if your hands are wet or damp.

Or watch a useful handwashing guide [here](#)<sup>7</sup>

## Respiratory hygiene

Cover your mouth with a tissue when you sneeze or blow your nose, dispose of the tissue immediately, then wash your hands, using the above handwashing instructions. If you are unable to wash your hands immediately, use a hand sanitiser which contains 60% alcohol.

## Extra COVID-19 resources;

[Prevent Spreading Germs Poster](#)<sup>8</sup>

[Reducing Spread of Infection Poster](#)<sup>9</sup>

[Free COVID-19 awareness video](#)<sup>10</sup>

## How workplaces may change when lockdown is eased...

While we are still living in a time of uncertainty and the rules and regulations are changing regularly, we have provided some general guidance for various sectors so that employers and employees alike can work together to continue to reduce the spread of the infection.

On the 4th July, the Government is planning to open at some of the remaining businesses and premises, see whether your business can open [here](#)<sup>11</sup>.

## General guidance for all workplaces

- Give employees the equipment/tools they need to work from home if it can be continued
- Alter seating plans to avoid face to face seating plans and maintain social distance where possible
- Stagger shifts and break times
- Provide hand sanitiser (60% alcohol) around the building - specifically near surfaces that are regularly touched by multiple people
- Regulate the use of corridors, lifts, entrances/exits and staircases
- Monitor the wellbeing of employees/colleagues working from home
- Provide more parking and bicycle storage to reduce the need for public transport
- Provide facilities to wash uniform at work so employees don't need to take them home
- Provide protective screens for public-facing employees
- Restrict the amount employees move between the building e.g. assigning them to a specific floor

## Offices

- Continue to work from home where possible
- Plan to have a minimal number of people on-site at any given time
- Avoid hot desking
- Take breaks outside to avoid coming into contact with other people
- Limit the use of shared office equipment
- Continue to use virtual tools to host meetings
- Provide hand sanitiser (must be 60% alcohol) in meeting rooms
- Hold meetings in well-ventilated rooms & keep meeting attendees spread out (with a '1 metre plus' (where 2 metres can't be met) gap

## Restaurants/Bars/Pubs

- As of the 4th July, the Government states that pubs and restaurants are allowed to open
- Venues should be keeping a temporary record of staff, customers and visitors for 21 days, in a way that is manageable for your business, and assist NHS Test and Trace with requests for that data if needed
- Try to do table service where possible rather than ordering at the bar and keep the same staff member to each table. Try to maintain the social distance from customers while taking orders
- Encourage the use of ordering on apps from tables
- Enhanced signage on queuing and hygiene for customers
- Discourage unnecessary trips by staff by using radios to communicate
- Reconfigure indoor and outdoor seating and tables to maintain social distancing guidelines
- Ensure that people visiting with children know that it is their responsibility to make sure they are supervised at all times
- Reduce the need for customers to queue, but where this is unavoidable, discouraging customers from queueing indoors
- Mark out '1 metre plus' (where 2 metres can't be met) distances for queuing
- Provide hand sanitiser (must be 60% alcohol) for customers
- Ask customers collecting takeaways to wait in their cars until called in
- Try to use contactless payments in order to avoid cash payments
- Enhance signage for good personal hygiene and cleaning for employees
- Reduce the number of people working in a kitchen where possible and reduce interactions between kitchen staff and non-kitchen staff (including breaks)
- Minimise access to walk-in pantries, fridges and freezers
- Separate workstations by '1 metre plus' distance (where 2 metres can't be met) where possible

- Encourage highest hygiene standards in kitchen areas
- Serve customers with tills 2 metres away from the kitchen, ideally behind a screen and separated from the kitchen by a partition or wall
- Work with local authorities to take into account queuing, parking, and use of public spaces, your venue might require and staggering opening hours to reduce demand on public transport and overcrowding

## Hotels

- Hotels who provide food and drink services should also consider the advice above as well as the below
- Have deep cleaning regimes in place between guests
- Use clear signage for guests and employees to promote good hygiene practises
- Interact with guests via phone, emails and apps where possible
- Use contactless payments where possible to avoid cash payments
- Avoid crowded reception areas
- Separate workstations by '1 metre plus' distance (where 2 metres can't be met) where possible
- Encourage food orders to be placed online or over the phone

## Workers entering other people's homes

- Do not carry out work in a house where someone is isolating or has been asked to shield away from other people
- Contact the occupants to discuss how best to minimise contact before visiting
- Avoid contact with vulnerable people in the house
- Assign employees to work in houses who live close, to reduce transportation
- Keep the same employee assigned to a household for each visit
- Use PPE where possible
- Wash hands upon entering the house & keep '1 metre plus' distance (where 2 metres can't be met) apart
- Take breaks outside and bring your own food and drink
- Identify busy parts of the house e.g. stairs, toilets, corridors and avoid where possible
- Ask people to leave doors open to reduce the need for opening and touching doors
- Use electronic payments
- Avoid direct contact where possible and limit the number of workers at any one time on the premises



## Factories and Warehouses

- Regularly clean objects, services, vehicles, equipment, tools, work areas and delivery boxes. This should be done after each use or at the end of each shift where possible
- Limit the number of people in company vehicles
- Remove waste from the building at the end of a shift
- Service and adjust ventilation systems
- Provide hand sanitiser (60% alcohol) at vehicles & delivery points
- Minimise portable toilets
- Record any visitors

## Shops & Branches

- Many non-essential retail businesses can now open provided they follow government guidelines to keep staff and customers as safe as possible
- Work out how many people can be in a shop at any given time to maintain the '1 metre plus' (where 2 metres can't be met) rule
- Encourage people to wear masks when entering the shop (while you cannot enforce this (only the police can) you should encourage it)
- Limit the number of people in the shop according to the above
- Suspend services that cannot comply with social distancing
- Provide as much guidance as possible to people visiting the shop
- Keep up to date with plans for shop traffic, queue management and outside queueing
- Ensure that people visiting with children know that it is their responsibility to make sure they are supervised at all times
- Replenish stock outside operating hours
- Encourage people to shop alone
- Have cleaning schedules in place for objects that are frequently touched and consider coverings for larger objects, for example, sofas.

## Working outdoors

- Only workers who are essential to carry out the work should attend
- Provide information and signage to members of the public so they can maintain social distancing
- In emergencies (fires, accidents, break-ins) social distancing does not need to take place
- Provide the necessary training to people hosting visitors

## Working in a vehicle

- Regularly clean vehicles
- Provide hand sanitiser (60% alcohol) or wipes within vehicles
- Reduce the number of people at depots or distribution centres
- Schedule collection times
- Ensure good ventilation in the vehicle
- Ensure it is the same people in a vehicle together if they need to be together frequently
- Limit exposure to large groups and rush hours
- Use one person to load/unload vehicles
- Drivers should remain in the vehicle if possible
- Arrange non-contact deliveries where possible
- Prepare for goods to be dropped off to a previously agreed area to avoid transmission, e.g. click and collect

## Education/Childcare

- Children of critical workers, vulnerable children, those with a social worker and some children with EHC's may continue attending education and childcare settings - unless they are in one of the most vulnerable health groups
- Staff with serious underlying health conditions should rigorously follow shielding measures
- Staff with other conditions that mean they are at increased risk of serious illness should work from home where possible
- Have staggered break/lunchtimes and schedule the movement of large groups of children around schools to reduce large gatherings
- Try to make sure both teachers and pupils are following social distancing measures
- Reduce the need for children to travel on public transport to attend education/childcare where possible
- Create a system to make the picking up and dropping off of children as quickly as possible to avoid coming into contact with other parents/children
- Make it clear that any children or parents exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 should not enter the education or childcare setting
- Encourage regular handwashing in staff and children (provide assistance for children who have trouble washing their hands)
- Increase levels of cleaning on surfaces in classrooms and in toilet blocks and changing rooms
- Try to keep parents as up to date as you can with what is happening with your school and engage with them to use educational resources with their children at home
- Keep class sizes to a minimum & reflect the number of teaching staff available

The Government offer a more in-depth look at [12 different 'types of work'](#)<sup>12</sup> and the measures that help protect employees and customers from Coronavirus while continuing to trade. These 12 are:

[Close contact services](#)<sup>13</sup>  
[Construction and other outdoor work](#)<sup>14</sup>  
[Factories, plants and warehouses](#)<sup>15</sup>  
[Heritage locations](#)<sup>16</sup>  
[Hotels and other guest accommodation](#)<sup>17</sup>  
[Labs and research facilities](#)<sup>18</sup>  
[Offices and contact centres](#)<sup>19</sup>  
[Other people's homes](#)<sup>20</sup>  
[Restaurants, pubs, bars and takeaway services](#)<sup>21</sup>  
[Shops and branches](#)<sup>22</sup>  
[Vehicles](#)<sup>23</sup>  
[The visitor economy](#)<sup>24</sup>

As well as the [5 main actions](#)<sup>25</sup> for businesses to take.

We're here to provide some clarity on Health & Safety and Training when it comes to returning to work. With iHASCO, getting prepared for your staff to start returning to work is simple...

- Risk Assessments - Carrying out a Risk Assessment of your workplace before staff return to work is going to be crucial. See our [IOSH Approved Risk Assessment training](#).<sup>26</sup>
- Assuring your staff - Being able to send out important documents and policies to all employees is also going to be crucial. Our [Documents and Policies add-on](#)<sup>27</sup> is the perfect solution for sharing important updates with staff and giving reassurances that you are taking things seriously.
- Training - Our [Returning to Work Essentials Training bundle](#)<sup>28</sup> is vital for employers and employees to achieve a happy and safe return to work. It also includes our Returning to Work after COVID-19 courses, which is essential for all organisations in the wake of Coronavirus.

## Returning to Work Training

Our [Returning to Work Training](#)<sup>29</sup> course that looks at what you and your organisation can do to make sure that returning to work after an extended period of time goes as smoothly as possible. The course touches upon what can be done beforehand, how to handle the first few days back, and other things such as policies and procedures.

## Returning to Work after COVID 19 Training

Our [Returning to Work \(COVID-19\) Training](#)<sup>30</sup> helps to ease an employee's transition back to work in light of COVID-19. This course looks at return-to-work catch-ups, risk assessments, team communication, handling concerns/anxiety in connection to COVID-19, potential new policies and practices to consider (i.e. social distancing), what to expect from managers during this time, and a few practical suggestions for handling pressure, finding focus, staying productive, and adjusting to 2020's new-normal.

## Appendix

- 1 <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>
- 2 <https://gov.wales/taking-all-reasonable-measures-maintain-physical-distancing-workplace>
- 3 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-business-and-physical-distancing-guidance/>
- 4 <https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/coronavirus-workplace-safety-guidance-and-priority-sector-list-published>
- 5 <https://www.ihasco.co.uk/blog/entry/2787/how-our-clients-are-using-ihasco-to-adapt-to-remote-working>
- 6 <https://www.myriskassessment.co.uk/>
- 7 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cjO\\_ROKzMPQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cjO_ROKzMPQ)
- 8 [https://www.ihasco.co.uk/uploads/resources/NHS\\_stop\\_spreading\\_germs\\_poster.pdf](https://www.ihasco.co.uk/uploads/resources/NHS_stop_spreading_germs_poster.pdf)
- 9 [https://www.ihasco.co.uk/uploads/resources/Reducing\\_Spread\\_of\\_Infection.pdf](https://www.ihasco.co.uk/uploads/resources/Reducing_Spread_of_Infection.pdf)
- 10 <https://youtu.be/exOSi6ZEadI>
- 11 <https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/further-businesses-and-premises-to-close-further-businesses-and-premises-to-close-guidance&sa=D&ust=1593507473487000&usg=AFQjCNFX823ocYbczLO1cUau4goiWDoldg>
- 12 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/the-visitor-economy>
- 13 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/close-contact-services>
- 14 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/construction-and-other-outdoor-work>
- 15 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/factories-plants-and-warehouses>
- 16 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/heritage-locations>
- 17 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/hotels-and-other-guest-accommodation>
- 18 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/labs-and-research-facilities>
- 19 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/offices-and-contact-centres>
- 20 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/homes>
- 21 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/restaurants-offering-takeaway-or-delivery>
- 22 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/shops-and-branches>
- 23 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/vehicles>
- 24 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/the-visitor-economy>
- 25 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/5-steps-to-working-safely>
- 26 <https://www.myriskassessment.co.uk/>
- 27 <https://www.ihasco.co.uk/blog/entry/2500/introducing-the-documents-and-policies-add-on>
- 28 <https://www.ihasco.co.uk/courses/bundles/returning-to-work-essentials>
- 29 <https://www.ihasco.co.uk/courses/detail/returning-to-work-training>