

COVID-19: RE-STARTING YOUR OFFICE BUSINESS



Re-starting your business after a temporary shutdown or reduction in operations can present specific hazards, which if not planned or managed properly, may result in damage, injury, legal action and further disruption to your business.

HERE'S WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR:

Where activities are either scaled up or scaled down compared to the pre-shutdown period, there can be increased risk of:

- fire / explosion
- machinery / plant damage or breakdown
- injury
- water damage.

These may be caused by a variety of factors including delayed maintenance cycles and frequent start up and shut down procedures.

Your business operations and activities may need to adapt particularly around office layout, staffing and capacity and an increased propensity / focus on home working. Where these changes introduce new hazards or exposures, risk

management measures, should all be re-assessed and adapted. This may include:

- safe systems of work / working procedures
- training
- cleaning / disinfection / sanitisation
- fire and security protection system.

If you've furloughed staff, you'll need to consider the timeframe agreed for returning to the workplace, so allow for this in planning arrangements.

If you're unable to create a safe working environment whether through inadequate fire protection, security, appropriate systems to support home workers and home working (including suitable work stations), employee competency or implementing COVID-19 precautions for example, then re-opening should be postponed until a time that corrective measures can be put in place.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

The following provides a checklist of key considerations to safely recommence your office business:

- **Observe and enforce COVID-19 workplace restrictions** in line with government regulations and guidance, including those relevant to:
 - o travel to work
 - o welfare provision
 - o cleaning / disinfection / sanitisation
 - o social distancing
 - o personal protective equipment (PPE)
 - o staggered working hours and breaks
 - o ventilation
 - o face coverings
 - o managing records of employees and visitors to support test and trace.

Where the regulations and guidance can't be met, work activities should either be revised to achieve them or stopped altogether. Guidance is available from:

- o **UK Government**, including **COVID Secure guidance** specific to Construction and other outdoor work
- o **Public Health England**
- o **Health Protection Scotland**
- o **Public Health Wales**
- o **Health and Safety Executive (HSE).**



Information relating to testing and vaccinations can be found in [our testing and vaccination PDF](#) and the [People FAQs section](#) of our Coronavirus Resource Hub. Further information can also be found via the above referenced government websites.

- **Consider how and when to communicate to employees** regarding re-opening and re-starting procedures and associated expectations, including proposed site rules:
 - o Is direct contact (phone for example) appropriate, particularly where employees have specific concerns about returning? For example if they live / need regular contact with a vulnerable person.
 - o Can electronic / remote platforms be used to release initial communications before re-opening?
 - o Should the first days of re-opening be used to communicate expectations, integrate employees back into their job role and activities, assess any immediate training needs / support, deliver training, deal with maintenance / inspection issues, and the practicalities of managing challenges relating to social and physical distancing?
 - o Consider the potential impacts of a significant period of time away from work, with some employees likely to benefit from a gradual / phased reintroduction.
- **Review existing risk assessments and actions** including safe systems of work / working procedures to check they're relevant to your business' operation and that you're taking all the appropriate measures to ensure a safe working environment for your employees, including those that continue to work from home.

Where your business operations and activities are required to change, plans should be updated and careful consideration given to whether:

- o new risk assessments should be



completed and the results and consequent actions shared with your employees (including any temporary and agency personnel), any visitors, contractors and other occupants or users where premises are shared.

- o fire, security, general premises safety, people safety, wellbeing and COVID-19 specific precautions should be included in your review, implementing changes and / or enhancements where necessary to maintain an appropriate level of protection.

Specific considerations may include:

- **Home working**
 - o continuing to encourage those employees that can work from home to do so
 - o reviewing policies and procedures specific to home and lone working, including arrangements for the provision of suitable work stations
 - o ensuring that IT and cyber security policies and procedures reflect any changes in work arrangements, acknowledging the increased potential for security breaches when individuals are working from home / unsupervised.

- **Returning to the office**
 - o advising employees to avoid using public transport if possible, and where use can't be avoided, to comply fully with government regulation and advice and the advice of the transport operator
 - o discouraging car sharing / employees from different households travelling to work together
 - o developing, implementing and communicating a strategy to maintain social / physical distancing
 - o introducing flexible working to facilitate staggered start and finish times and limiting the numbers of people on the premises at any given time
 - o working closely and collaboratively with landlords and other occupants in multi-tenure buildings to ensure consistency of approach in common areas
 - o limiting the number of entry and exit points with separate entry and exit points if possible
 - o limiting the numbers of people permitted to use communal areas, rest rooms and other welfare facilities at any time
 - o providing designated safe outdoor spaces for rest breaks, if practical
 - o encouraging employees to bring their own food
 - o providing social distancing coordinators / champions to highlight social distancing requirements
 - o encouraging potential visitors to participate in remote meetings, conference or video calls as an alternative to face-to-face meetings
 - o limiting numbers (to one at a time) using lifts





- o providing markings and signage to assist with social distancing requirements, taking into account traffic management and pedestrian segregation; markings and signage in car parks, reception areas and lifts may be useful to provide an early reminder
- o provision and maintenance of suitable ventilation
- o liaising with nearby / proximate premises and / or other building occupants to assist with possible shared parking and requirements for social distancing in communal areas
- o providing appropriately marked one-way systems in car parks and communal areas to help maintain social distancing
- o using barriers or screens at reception areas and to separate people from each other
- o using welcome monitors / screens, PC monitors screens, laptops and tablets to remind employees and visitors of social distancing, hand washing and hygiene requirements
- o reducing the number of people individuals have contact with by using fixed teams or partnering
- o changing the layout of office space and rest areas to reduce the potential for face-to-face contact, with back-to-back or side-to-side working preferred
- o careful management of meetings and training with delivery to be remote, whenever possible
- o providing cleaning stations at entrance and exit points and other strategic locations with signage to remind employees and visitors of the importance of washing hands and hygiene
- o establishing cleaning, disinfection and sanitisation procedures with a focus on identification of regular touch points including door handles, lift buttons, keypads, stair handrails, welfare facilities and office equipment for example etc.
- o avoiding shared use of IT equipment and 'hot desking'
- o limiting the use of high-touch items such as printers and whiteboards
- o removing / restricting touch points in staff areas where practical i.e. vending machines and other canteen equipment for general employee use
- o providing adequate and suitable welfare facilities for employees, including areas for safely changing and storing clothing
- o providing information for remote and lone workers who are involved in work away / sales related activities and driving for example.
- **Health and wellbeing**
 - o enhancing arrangements to ensure the wellbeing of those working from home is monitored and introducing systems to enable them to stay connected

o considering the health and wellbeing of those returning to work and any specific anxieties individuals may have. Communication is key, and it may be beneficial for those employees who have already returned to share experiences (travel, the office environment etc.) with those who will be expected to return at a later date.

Further support can be found on our [health & safety risk assessment](#), [safe systems of work](#), [fire risk assessment](#), [escape of water](#) and [cyber security](#) pages. See also external guidance provided by the [HSE](#) and [Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers \(CIBSE\)](#)

- **Develop and carry out enhanced workplace cleaning, disinfection and sanitisation programmes.** The importance of enhanced cleaning regimes covering all visitor facing and staff areas is highlighted in previous paragraphs, with procedures to be established for pre and post re-opening cleaning, disinfection and sanitisation. Areas for particular focus include touch points such as washing facilities, toilet flushes and seats, door handles, push plates, hand rails, IT equipment used by employees and vehicles (company car drivers for example).

If you're introducing alcohol-based hand sanitisers, remember these are flammable. As well as updating your fire risk assessments to keep your premises and people safe, ensure storage and use is clear of ignition sources (for example, electrical equipment, hot surfaces, smoking areas etc.) and ideally store within purpose designed flammable liquid cabinets, otherwise, steel cabinets. Further support can be found on our [storage and use of flammable / explosive materials](#) page.

- **Undertake a thorough inspection of your site** including:
 - o all buildings (interior and exterior communal areas for example)
 - o boundary fences
 - o gates and barriers
 - o utility services (including water systems and any other potential sources of legionella, power facilities and ventilation / air conditioning systems)
 - o fall protection systems
 - o dry risers

- o plant / equipment
- o emergency back-up systems and safety equipment, to establish and correct any unsafe or abnormal conditions, such as damage, maintenance issues, leaks, faulty safety and emergency systems, improper housekeeping or storage, signs of vandalism or theft etc.

Our **equipment checklist** may assist you. The **HSE** has released specific guidance on Legionella risks during the coronavirus outbreak, with advice also available on our **Legionella bacteria** page.

- **Review emergency response procedures** to verify:
 - o they're up-to-date
 - o adequate coverage for assigned positions on all shifts, including for example first aiders and fire marshals.

Further support can be found on our **emergency procedures** page.

- **Plan sufficient time to recommission previously shutdown machinery / plant and processes** in line with all standard operating procedures (SOPs) and manufacturers' guidelines.
- **Complete and reinstate any inspection, testing and maintenance procedures** including those of a statutory nature that may have lapsed since the shutdown. This could include utility services, machinery / plant (for example passenger lifts and escalators), emergency systems etc. Our **equipment checklist** may assist you, in addition to external guidance, such as the **HSE**.
- **Appoint competent persons** to verify all protection / detection systems, including fire sprinkler / suppression systems, fire pumps, water supplies, fire alarm systems, intruder alarm systems, CCTV, access control, barriers, gates etc., are in service and functioning correctly.
- **Ensure work competence and capability of employees** for the activities to be carried out checking all:
 - o possess the necessary and appropriate skills
 - o have received appropriate information, instruction and training, and hold the correct and up-to-date certificates and licenses, where required.

Additional training programmes and / or certification, instruction, information and supervision may be required where there is an insufficient number of competent personnel with regard to your return-to-work-policy (where in place). This can help provide structure and a framework to ensure your personnel are fit for work and consider issues such as mental health, wellbeing and physical fitness.

In reviewing the training arrangements and competency requirements, specific consideration should be given to the following:

- **Availability and responsibilities of key personnel**
 - o senior managers
 - o Human Resources, Facilities Management and Health, Safety & Environmental personnel;
 - o first aiders
 - o fire marshals
 - o cleaning personnel (internal and externally appointed contractors); and
 - o where relevant, security personnel.
- **Formal induction / re-induction**
 - o specific expectations and controls relating to COVID-19 and any amendment to rules
 - o consider the specific requirements of any vulnerable workers (young persons, new and expectant mothers, any groups identified as being at risk of severe illness as a result of COVID-19).
 - o address changes in methods of work (increased home working for example) and associated expectations and challenges.
- **Other training needs**
 - o Conflict resolution / management training to address potential colleague and customer challenges in implementing COVID-19 secure measures
 - o familiarisation (site, plant and machinery for example) to be specifically considered, with returning furloughed employees and operatives potentially not having operated plant or been in a site environment for a significant period of time.
- **Training delivery**
 - o requirements for social and physical

distancing for example, are likely to impact the practicalities of training delivery, including induction and toolbox talks. This should be considered as part of the risk assessment process, including available facilities, numbers that can be safely accommodated, duration, potential barriers to communication etc.

Further support can be found on our **training** page.

- **Review your business continuity plan** including:
 - o supply chain resilience (IT systems for example)
 - o implementation and mitigation measures, to reflect any changes to your business operation and lessons learned from the temporary shutdown.

Visit our **business continuity** page for further support.

Further information and support is available on our **risk management portal** and **Coronavirus resource hub**