



ASTONLARK

COVID-19 Workplace Risk Assessment

With businesses starting to think about reoccupying their premises, it is essential that they start planning for this now.

Whilst the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) has said they will take a 'flexible and proportionate account of the risks and challenges arising from the pandemic', there is always the possibility of prosecution of those businesses that fail to follow Government advice. Additionally, the HSE may choose to issue prohibition or improvement notices.

The potential for employee liability claims also exists if businesses failed in their duty of care to staff.

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

Under the Health and Safety at Work Act etc 1974 (HSWA), employers have a legal duty to protect the health, safety and welfare of their employees and anybody else who might be affected by their activities.

For those organisations that have not been able to arrange for staff to work remotely/from home, it is essential that measures are put in place to reduce the risk of Covid-19 spreading between employees, visitors, contractors and customers.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 additionally states that employers must conduct a risk assessment of their activities and premises to identify these potential causes of harm and take steps to reduce the likelihood of this harm occurring.

If you employ five or more members of staff, it is a legal requirement to keep a written record of the main findings of your risk assessment. Even if you have fewer than five members of staff, it's good practice to document your risk assessments, as this will help you to demonstrate the steps you have taken to create a safe and compliant working environment.

You are required to review and update your risk assessment as circumstances change and keeping abreast of Government guidance will therefore be essential.

For more information on carrying out risk assessments, you can visit the HSE website at <https://www.hse.gov.uk/risk/controlling-risks.htm>

Three areas you may want to consider in your plans to reoccupy your business premises are:

- Business Needs
- Employee Issues
- Environmental Issues

BUSINESS NEEDS

Firstly, review how the business has performed during the lockdown period. What activities or functions cannot work remotely or are not performing well, and therefore need to be brought back into the workplace.

Are there functions that are performing well and do not need to be brought back into the workplace? The more people you can keep working remotely, the better. With social distancing requirements, the more space you have available in the workplace, the easier it will be to comply with Government guidance.

EMPLOYEE ISSUES

Next, carry out a review of your employees. Questions to consider may include:

- Which employees are classified as vulnerable (age, illness, pregnant etc)?
- Are there employees living with others that are being shielded?
- How do employees commute to the workplace? Will this increase their exposure?
- Which employees may have increased anxiety levels, where a return to the workplace may cause mental health issues?
- Are there others who may be complacent and increase risks in the workplace?

ENVIRONMENTAL/WORKPLACE ISSUES

Finally, your risk assessment for controlling the risk of the disease spreading in your premises should look at areas such as:

- Site control
- Cleaning
- Signage and education
- Employee behaviour
- Procedures

Below we look at some of the measures within each of these categories that could be implemented:

SITE CONTROL

- Can you limit the number of entry and exit points to the building, without putting staff into closer proximity to each other and without blocking fire exits?
- Can start and finish times be staggered to reduce the number of people arriving and leaving the premises at the same time?
- Can you rotate staff coming to the office/working from home so fewer people are on the premises at any one time?
- Can you prevent access to the building by visitors and maintenance staff? Or, if essential access is required, can you limit their access to defined areas?
- Where a retail space, can you control the numbers in the area, and control the way people move around the area?
- Can you create additional 'space' or provide physical barriers between customers and staff?
- Have you provided hand sanitisation points at all entrances and exits?
- Can non-touch dispensers be installed?
- What measures can be taken to reduce the frequency of contact with door mechanisms? Can they be held open with acoustic or magnetic systems (e.g. DorGuard)?
- Have you encouraged staff to use stairs and not lifts to help maintain a 2 metre separation?
- Can desks be repositioned further apart? Can employees use other parts of the building to further increase segregation?

CLEANING

- Can the frequency of site cleaning be increased?
- Can you ensure all hand contact points are cleaned throughout the day including door furniture, handrails, IT equipment, desks, phones, flush plates, taps, dispensers, etc?
- If you employ cleaning contractors, do they have a Business Continuity Plan to cater for ill/absent employees?
- What have your cleaning contractors done to raise awareness of your site rules amongst any temporary staff they use?
- Have you ensured cleaning operatives are using appropriate cleaning substances and methodology?
- Have you removed items from the premises which would hinder the ability to clean with ease (e.g. rugs, mats, curtains and blinds)?

- Have you provided staff with sprays and wipes to clean their desks and equipment, and can you ensure staff are doing this regularly?
- Can you ensure plates, cutlery etc are cleaned immediately in break-out spaces?
- Can washroom steam cleaning be introduced?
- Are staff provided with hand sanitisers?

SIGNAGE & EDUCATION

- Are posters and instructions displayed at all entry and exit points and regularly refreshed?
- Can educational videos be played on screens in public areas?
- Have you provided regular news and updates to staff in emails?

EMPLOYEE BEHAVIOUR

- Wherever possible, are employees working from home?
- Do you have video conferencing facilities for meetings? Can other software apps such as 'Google Hangouts' be used for staff working remotely without the appropriate technology?
- Can the travel methods to get to and from work be altered? Can you stagger working hours so not all staff use public transport in rush hour?
- Can internal meetings be held in an outdoor space?
- Are you ensuring staff are maintaining 2 metre distances from each other? Where this isn't possible, have you stopped the task or established an alternative method?
- Have you split teams to reduce the numbers of employees in possible contact with each other?
- Can you stagger breaktimes and limit the numbers of employees in canteens?
- Have you ensured that staff are not hand shaking or issuing personal greetings in close proximity?
- Can the use of items of plant/machinery be limited to one individual per shift? At the end of the shift, is the equipment thoroughly cleaned?
- Have staff been provided with suitable Personal Protective Equipment? Are staff aware of how it should be used?

PROCEDURES

- Are emergency procedures in place in case an employee becomes ill or shows symptoms?
- Have staff been advised of self-isolation procedures?

