

Working safely during coronavirus

Current government coronavirus (COVID-19) advice is that anyone who can work effectively from home should do so.

For workplaces that are open, everyone should:

- follow government guidance on making the workplace safe
- avoid busy commuting times on public transport where travel is essential, and wear a face covering
- wash their hands regularly

You must not go to work if you or anyone in your household has symptoms.

Making your workplace safe

Employers have a 'duty of care' for staff, customers and anyone else who visits the workplace. This means they must do all they reasonably can to support their health, safety and wellbeing.

To make the workplace safe, employers must:

- encourage staff to work from home, wherever possible
- have completed a 'risk assessment', and taken reasonable steps to prevent harm in the workplace
- follow the [government guidelines on safer working on GOV.UK](#)

The government guidelines include advice, and legal requirements where relevant, for different sectors and types of work.

For example, there are some workplaces where face coverings must now be worn or where specific safety measures must be taken.

Social distancing at work

In Scotland and Wales, everyone should stay 2 metres (6 feet) apart ('social distancing' or 'physical distancing').

In England, everyone should stay 2 metres apart where possible. If it's not possible, people should be at least 1 metre apart and the employer should make extra changes to keep people safe. This might include things like wearing face coverings, working side by side instead of face to face, or using screens or barriers to separate people.

Health and safety advice

To get advice on working safely during coronavirus from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) you can:

- [find coronavirus advice on the HSE website](#)
- [find information on risk assessments on the HSE website](#)
- [use HSE's online enquiry form](#)
- call 0300 790 6787, Monday to Friday 8:30am to 10pm

Which workplaces can open

The rules on which workplaces can open are different for England, Scotland and Wales. For the latest government guidance:

- in England, see [businesses and premises that must stay closed on GOV.UK](#)
- in Scotland, see [Scottish Government advice on business closures](#)
- in Wales, see [Welsh Government advice on business closures](#)

If the workplace is closed

While the workplace is closed, employers should talk to staff about whether or not they can work from home.

If working from home is not possible, staff might:

- stay on ['furlough'](#) (temporary leave)
- return from furlough on a part-time basis ('flexible furlough')
- use paid holiday
- use other paid or unpaid leave

Keeping in touch

This can be a difficult time for both employers and staff.

Employers should talk to staff regularly to:

- check on their health and wellbeing
- update staff on any actions they've taken

Employers should also talk to staff about any plans to change where they work from. For example:

- working from home again, for those who've previously returned to the workplace
- when it's safe to do so, [returning to the workplace](#)

Employers should tell staff about any health and wellbeing support available. For example:

- support your workplace provides, for example through your employee assistance programme (EAP) if there's one available
- support that's available outside your workplace, for example [mental health support from Mind](#)

Find out more about [supporting mental health](#).

Working from home

For any employee working from home, the employer should:

- pay the employee as usual
- keep in regular contact
- check on the employee's health and wellbeing

Find out more about:

- [working from home](#)
- [health and safety for homeworking from the Health and Safety Executive](#)
- [our training course on how to manage homeworkers](#)

Training on transitioning from lockdown

Acas provides training for employers on managing the transition from lockdown. Our courses are currently delivered remotely.

[Book training on transitioning from lockdown.](#)

Government coronavirus guidance

Wider government guidance on the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is updated regularly. For the latest guidance:

- in England, see [coronavirus advice on GOV.UK](#)
- in Scotland, see [Scottish Government advice](#)
- in Wales, see [Welsh Government advice](#)

Current government advice is that anyone who can work effectively from home should do so.

In some cases, this may mean talking to staff about:

- changing plans for returning to the workplace
- working from home again if they've already returned to the workplace

Where it's safe to return to the workplace, it's important that employers talk to staff as early as possible about this.

2. Planning to return to work

Employers should 'consult' with staff (ask for and consider their views to try and reach an agreement) about returning to work. This includes:

- trade union representatives
- employee representatives
- health and safety representatives

Employers should also check any agreements they have with a trade union or employee representatives to see if they must formally consult.

Employees and workers should be ready to return to work at short notice, but employers should be flexible where possible.

Making the workplace safe

Employers must make the workplace as safe as possible for staff, customers and anyone else who visits. To do this employers must:

- encourage staff to work from home, wherever possible
- do a 'risk assessment' to identify what might cause harm and take reasonable steps to prevent it
- follow the government guidelines on [working safely during coronavirus on GOV.UK](#)

To get advice on working safely during coronavirus from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) you can:

- [find coronavirus advice on the HSE website](#)
- [find information on risk assessments on the HSE website](#)
- [use HSE's online enquiry form](#)
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Discussing plans with staff

Employers, employees and workers should talk as early as possible about any plans to return to work. The same applies for any plans to change back to working from home.

It's a good idea to talk about:

- when staff might return to the workplace or start working from home again
- how staff will travel to and from work
- how health and safety is being reviewed and managed – you should share the latest risk assessment
- any planned adjustments to the workplace, for example additional hand washing facilities, staggering start and finish times to avoid overcrowding or floor markings to help people stay apart
- if there might be a phased return of the workforce, for example some staff returning before others
- working from home arrangements

Wherever possible, employers should speak to staff before making a decision or putting plans in writing. This can help staff understand, and feel included in, decisions.

Changes that might affect someone's employment contract

If there are any proposed changes that affect the written terms of someone's contract, the employer must consult with the employee, worker or their representative, for example their trade union representative.

[Find out more about changing an employment contract.](#)

If staff are worried

Some people might be anxious about safety and returning to the workplace. Others might be anxious about not being able to return to the workplace.

Employers should encourage staff to talk to them about any concerns they have, and try to resolve them together.

If someone does not want to return

Some people might feel they do not want to go back to work, or be unable to return yet.

For example, this might be because they're:

- worried about catching coronavirus
- [at high risk of getting a severe illness if they catch coronavirus](#)
- caring for children
- living with someone who has been advised to stay at home by their doctor because they have a serious health condition

An employer should listen to any concerns staff may have and should take steps to protect everyone.

For example, they could:

- offer extra car parking where possible so that people can avoid using public transport
- keep someone on '[furlough](#)' (temporary leave) if they're temporarily unable to work
- arrange for someone to work different hours temporarily to avoid peak time travel

If someone still does not want to go back to work, they may be able to arrange with their employer to take the time off as holiday or unpaid leave. The employer does not have to agree to this.

If someone refuses to attend work without a valid reason, it could result in disciplinary action.

Find out more about:

- [shielding and vulnerable people](#) – including what employees and employers should do if someone's doctor advises them to stay at home
- [absence from work](#)

Raising an issue

If an employee or worker has an issue about changes to ways of working, they should raise it with their employer or manager. Employers and managers should take any issues raised by staff seriously.

Read about:

- [how to raise a problem at work](#)
- [dealing with a problem raised by an employee](#)

Related content

[Extending and ending furlough](#)

[/working-from-home](#)

[Podcast - returning to the workplace](#)

[Training course - transition from lockdown](#)

An individual should not go to the workplace if they:

- have coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms or have tested positive for coronavirus
- are told to self-isolate (stay at home) by a government test and trace service, because they've been in close contact with someone who's tested positive
- need to self-isolate because someone in their household has symptoms or has tested positive
- need to [self-isolate because they've returned to the UK](#) after a holiday or business travel

If they're already at work, they should:

- tell their employer immediately and go home
- avoid touching anything, and wash their hands regularly
- cough or sneeze into a tissue and put it in a bin, or if they do not have tissues, cough and sneeze into the crook of their elbow
- use a separate bathroom from others, if possible
- avoid using public transport to travel home, if possible

3. If someone with coronavirus comes to work

If someone with coronavirus comes to work, the workplace does not necessarily have to close, but they should follow cleaning advice.

[See advice for cleaning workplaces on GOV.UK.](#)

Supporting staff who need to self-isolate

If someone needs to self-isolate, it's good practice for employers to:

- send them home immediately, if they're at work
- support them staying at home while they self-isolate
- arrange for them to work from home, if they're well enough to work
- pay them any [sick pay they're entitled to while self-isolating](#)
- support their wellbeing and mental health – see more about [supporting mental health during coronavirus](#)

Depending on someone's circumstances, they might have to self-isolate more than once during the coronavirus pandemic. Employers should support them in the same way each time.

To find out how long someone must self-isolate for, see:

- [self-isolation for someone who has symptoms or has tested positive](#)
- [self-isolation after returning to the UK](#)

For workplace advice about the government test and trace services:

- in England, see [NHS Test and Trace workplace guidance on GOV.UK](#)
- in Scotland, see [Test and Protect advice for employers on gov.scot](#)
- in Wales, see [Test, trace, protect advice for employers on gov.wales](#)

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