

Working from home during the coronavirus pandemic

Employers and employees should be practical, flexible and sensitive to each other's situation when working from home because of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

For the latest government guidance:

- in England, see [national lockdown advice on going to work on GOV.UK](#)
- in Scotland, see [Scottish Government advice on working from home](#)
- in Wales, see [Welsh Government advice on working from home](#)

1. Deciding on working from home arrangements

There might be a need for ongoing changes to working arrangements during the pandemic. For example, because of changes to government rules or employees' circumstances.

When making decisions about working from home, it's important employers and employees communicate regularly. For example, to discuss:

- which roles can and cannot be done from home
- who may or may not want to work from home
- any concerns and how best to handle them

This can also help make sure that decisions about working from home are fair and [follow discrimination law](#).

Employers should also talk with any trade union or other employee representatives. If an employer has an existing agreement with a recognised trade union about working from home, for example an agreed homeworking policy, they must consult the trade union if they're considering any changes.

Find out more about:

- [employee communications and consultation](#)
- [employee representation](#)

Pay and terms and conditions

An employee's pay and other terms and conditions of their employment stay the same, apart from having to work from home on a temporary basis.

Employees working from home are still covered by [the law on working hours](#).

Employers should talk to their employees and any representatives about who will cover any extra costs employees might have when working from home.

If a homeworking expenses policy has been previously agreed with a trade union, the employer must agree any changes with the

union.

[Find out more about homeworking expenses on GOV.UK.](#)

Checking insurance cover

Employees should check there are no issues with them working from home, with their:

- home insurer
- mortgage provider or landlord

It's a good idea for employers to remind their employees to check this. Employers should also make sure their insurance covers employees working from home.

Equipment and technology

It's important for employees to have the right equipment and technology needed to work from home effectively. This can also help avoid extra stress.

Things employers, employees and any representatives should agree on include:

- what's needed to do the job, for example a reliable and secure internet connection or a suitable desk and chair
- who will provide or cover the costs of equipment and repairs
- technical support for setting up any new equipment or technology, including any training

Employers should have clear policies around work equipment and technology, including:

- how to report any issues and to who, for example the IT team
- how they will monitor use and handle information
- rules around data protection and cyber security
- what to do if a work device is lost or stolen

Employers should regularly check with employees to assess how technology and equipment is working, and make any improvements.

For example, checking:

- IT systems are handling the number of staff working remotely
- the level of IT support needed for homeworkers
- any extra equipment that might be needed from time to time, for example headsets or stationery

Having a homeworking policy

Having a homeworking policy helps everyone to know:

- how people will be set up to work from home, including how the employer will carry out [risk assessments](#)
- who will provide and pay for equipment
- how homeworkers will be managed
- how things like expenses, tax and information security are handled
- the employer's approach to homeworking in non-emergency situations

If a homeworking policy has been previously agreed with a trade union, the employer must agree any changes with a trade union representative.

[Download a template homeworking policy.](#)

[Download Acas's guide to homeworking in non-emergency situations](#) (PDF, 272 KB, 43 pages).

2. Employer responsibilities

By law, employers are responsible for the health and safety of all employees, including those working from home.

Risk assessments

Employers must conduct a risk assessment of their employees' work activities, including any work from home.

Under the law, a risk assessment must be 'suitable and sufficient'.

If the employer is not able to carry out a full risk assessment due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, they should provide their employees with information on working safely at home. This could include asking employees to carry out a self-assessment of their workspace and equipment.

Employers can use the [Preparing for homeworking during coronavirus questionnaire from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development \(CIPD\)](#).

If changes are needed to make sure an employee can work at home in a safe and healthy way, employers are responsible for making sure they happen.

Employers should review risk assessments regularly to make sure employees' working environments at home remain safe and healthy.

Find out more about [what employers should do from the Health and Safety Executive \(HSE\)](#).

Employee responsibilities

Employees have a responsibility to take reasonable care of their own health and safety at work.

Anyone working from home should keep in regular contact with their manager. They should also tell their manager about:

- any physical or mental health and safety risks
- any working arrangements that need to change, for example because of caring responsibilities

It's important that employees and managers communicate regularly and work together to find suitable solutions.

Looking after mental and physical health

While working at home during the coronavirus pandemic, people might be experiencing problems such as:

- stress, anxiety, loneliness or other mental health issues

- feeling unhealthy as they're not able to take their usual exercise
- finding it harder to switch off from work
- working longer hours
- feeling pressure to work while ill ('presenteeism')
- physical pain because they do not have the right working equipment, for example musculoskeletal problems caused by an unsuitable chair and desk at home

Everyone should make sure they:

- look after their mental and physical health, for example by getting support and doing regular exercise
- take regular screen breaks, the [rest breaks they're entitled to](#), and switch off their work equipment at the end of the working day
- manage their work-life balance, for example by having clear start and finish times
- know what [sick pay and leave](#) they're entitled to
- have the necessary equipment and information to work safely

It's important to remember that everyone's experience will be different. Employers and managers should talk together with their employees and:

- follow the [law on working hours](#)
- encourage sharing of any problems they may have
- not make assumptions about what support might or might not be needed
- agree on what support may be needed, for example if an employee with a disability needs [reasonable adjustments](#)

For more advice, see:

- [Coronavirus and mental health at work](#)
- [Live Well on the NHS website](#)

Domestic violence and abuse

During the pandemic, there has been an increase in domestic violence and abuse. It has also become more difficult for people to get away from the person abusing them (the 'perpetrator').

Employers have a legal duty of care to their employees and should:

- look out for signs of domestic abuse
- respond appropriately
- support someone who is experiencing domestic abuse
- keep a record of incidents at work and when employees report domestic abuse, and any actions taken

See guidance on [looking out for signs of domestic abuse on GOV.UK](#).

How an employer can help

Employers should make clear what support is available if an employee is experiencing domestic abuse, such as:

- finding a way to communicate safely, for example by text message if calls are not possible, or a different email address if their email is being monitored by the perpetrator
- agreeing on a code word or hand signal for someone to use to alert others that they're experiencing domestic abuse
- arranging another place they can do their work instead of at home
- being flexible around working hours

- time off, for example to attend support appointments
- helping the person get other appropriate support

Employers should consider having a domestic abuse policy. They should develop it in consultation with employees and any trade union or employee representatives.

The policy should set out:

- a clear commitment to taking the issue seriously
- common signs of domestic abuse
- the support available for employees and managers

All employees should be made aware of the policy and be able to access it.

Employers can download:

- a handbook on [managing and supporting employees experiencing domestic abuse on the CIPD website](#) (PDF, 567KB, 32 pages)
- a [domestic abuse toolkit for employers on the Business in the Community \(BITC\) website](#)

Help and support

You can find more [guidance on domestic abuse from GOV.UK](#).

People experiencing or perpetrating domestic abuse can contact organisations including:

- [Refuge](#) – national domestic abuse charity, also provides a 24-hour helpline freephone: 0808 2000 247
- [Women's Aid](#) – domestic abuse support for women and children
- [Respect](#) – provides help for perpetrators
- [Galop](#) – LGBT+ anti-violence charity

Employers can contact:

- [Hestia](#) – advice line for employers: 0777 0480 437 or 0203 8793 695, email: advice@hestia.org or download their free app [Bright Sky](#)
- [Employers' Initiative on Domestic Abuse \(EIDA\)](#) – also provides a coronavirus (COVID-19) employer pack

Related content

[/absence-from-work/time-off-because-of-a-mental-health-issue](#)

It's particularly important for employers and employees to keep in touch with each other when working from home.

It's a good idea to:

- agree how and when to communicate with each other
- make sure everyone has the right tools to keep in contact and knows how to use them
- be understanding and flexible about individual circumstances during this time

Employers should keep everyone up to date and involved in decisions about working arrangements and [returning to the workplace](#).

3. Getting communication right

Where possible, employers should provide different ways for people to stay in touch to prevent feelings of loneliness and isolation. For example, instant messenger tools, video meetings, as well as emails.

It's important to find the right balance and be clear about the purpose for getting in touch. Constant or unnecessary contact can cause stress and affect morale.

Using too many different methods to communicate can also be confusing and stressful. Employers should talk to their employees and any representatives about which communication methods work best and when.

It can be harder to notice problems people are having if you're not meeting face-to-face. When communicating remotely, employers and managers should:

- start conversations
- ask questions
- be aware of any changes in behaviour or tone of voice
- listen carefully to any concerns

Remote meetings

Online meetings are one of the main ways to communicate remotely, but should be used in the right way.

Too many meetings can reduce productivity and cause stress, anxiety and fatigue.

When arranging a meeting you should:

- make sure it's definitely needed
- schedule it as far in advance as possible
- make clear the purpose of the meeting to those attending
- check if anyone might find attending difficult, for example because of caring responsibilities or disruptions

One-to-one meetings

One-to-one meetings are good opportunities to talk about how work is going, as well as how people are feeling.

Managers should have regular one-to-ones with each member of their team, including new starters.

Supporting new starters who are working from home

Starting a new job can be a daunting experience, particularly when someone is joining remotely.

New starters may feel isolated from their new role and colleagues when they cannot meet face-to-face.

It's important that their employer and manager finds ways to help them settle in, for example by:

- briefly explaining the organisation's structure and how their role fits in
- setting out a clear schedule for their first week, including appointments to meet colleagues
- putting together short welcome messages from team members and management, with photos if possible
- giving some basic information about the usual workplace, particularly if working from home is only temporary
- posting an induction pack to their home

Social activities

Making time for social activities can help keep employees feeling connected and motivated. For example, quizzes and coffee catch-ups using video calls.

It's important to make sure everyone feels included, no matter where they are working.

Related content

[/working-safely-coronavirus/returning-to-the-workplace](#)

To keep working from home as healthy and productive as possible, it's important to have trust and confidence between employers and employees.

Working from home and caring responsibilities

During this time, many employees will be under a lot of stress juggling caring responsibilities with work. Employers should be sensitive and flexible towards individual situations.

It's important for employers and employees to be proactive in having regular conversations and getting support in place where necessary.

In some circumstances, it might be helpful to agree to a temporary working arrangement that's more flexible around the employee's caring responsibilities. Ways to do this might include:

- working different hours or patterns
- reducing work targets for an agreed period of time
- flexible deadlines, where possible
- [time off for caring responsibilities](#), for example attending appointments

Managers and employees should agree together:

- whether to make any changes
- how long any changes will last
- when the changes will be reviewed

The agreement should be put in writing.

If an employee wants a permanent change, they might be able to make a [formal flexible working request](#).

Managing performance

Employees can be just as productive, or even more so, working from home.

Others might find it hard to:

- motivate and organise themselves
- separate their work and home lives
- manage their time

It's important to establish a level of trust and for everyone to be clear on what is expected. This can help improve performance and reduce stress and anxiety.

Managers who have previously assessed performance by what they see their staff doing in person will need to change how they manage employees working from home.

Employers and managers should talk with employees to agree on:

- how to manage and measure performance
- clear objectives
- learning and development that can be done remotely

Employers should be flexible and sensitive to individual circumstances.

Monitoring at work

Employers might find it more difficult to manage employees while they are working from home. For example, they might have concerns around performance if they cannot see the employee working in person.

Employers might monitor employees' activities at work in various ways, but it's also important to trust employees to do their job.

If monitoring is too much or does not respect the employee's privacy, it can damage employees' trust in the employer, cause stress and reduce productivity.

Employers should also remember that employees are entitled to some privacy at work, including when they are working from home.

Ways of monitoring might include:

- looking at use of email
- checking website visits
- recording or listening to phone calls

Any monitoring arrangements must follow data protection law.

Employers should carry out an 'impact assessment' to decide if and how to carry out monitoring. This involves:

- clearly setting out the reasons for monitoring and the likely benefits
- identifying any negative effects the monitoring might have on employees
- looking at other options to monitoring or different ways to carry it out
- understanding the law around monitoring, for example, how information will be collected and used
- considering all of the above, deciding whether there is a valid reason for carrying out monitoring

Employers should consult with employees and any representatives before introducing any form of monitoring. There should also be a clear written policy and procedure in place.

Employers must tell employees about any monitoring arrangements and the reason for it, except in extremely limited circumstances, for example, because they suspect criminal activity.

[Find out more about monitoring at work from the Information Commissioner's Office \(ICO\).](#)

Remote bullying and harassment

Bullying and harassment can still happen when employees are working from home. For example, on social media, in emails, phone calls or online chat tools.

Examples of bullying and harassment that can happen remotely include:

- putting someone down in meetings
- spreading false rumours
- revealing sensitive personal information
- inappropriately stopping someone from coming to meetings or activities
- putting humiliating, offensive or threatening comments or photos on social media

Employers should include guidance on use of different communication methods, including social media, in bullying or disciplinary policies. This should clearly set out what behaviour is unacceptable.

[Find out more about bullying and harassment.](#)

Resolving problems while working at home

If there's a problem at work, it's usually better to try and [resolve it informally first](#).

If this is not possible, formal discipline and grievance procedures still apply while people are working from home because of coronavirus.

The circumstances of those involved in a disciplinary or grievance procedure may be affected by the pandemic so employers need to consider how to proceed in a fair and reasonable way. They should do this by talking with those involved in the procedure.

[Find out more about disciplinary and grievance procedures during coronavirus.](#)

Training for managers

Acas provides training on managing people working from home. Our courses are currently held on video meetings.

[Book training on how to manage homeworkers.](#)

Related content

[Training course - how to manage homeworkers /disciplinary-grievance-procedures-during-coronavirus](#)

Employers and employees may have found benefits working from home, such as:

- increased productivity
- a healthier work-life balance
- improved job satisfaction

Some employees may wish to continue to work from home for some or all of the week after their workplaces fully reopen. They may also want to work flexibly in other ways.

Employees can make an informal request for flexible working, or if they're eligible, a formal request.

Employers and managers should:

- encourage and be open to conversations around all flexible working arrangements
- carefully consider which jobs can be done flexibly and not make assumptions
- work with the employee to find a solution that works for both, where possible

Find out more about:

- [making a formal flexible working request](#)
- [responding to a flexible working request](#)
- [long-term homeworking](#) (PDF, 272KB, 43 pages)

When making a decision on a formal flexible working request, employers must follow the [Acas Code of Practice on flexible working requests](#).

5. Tailored support for employers

As an employer, you can get tailored support from Acas if you're facing any challenges setting up or managing working from home.

[Find out more about our tailored support.](#)

Related content

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