

## Returning to the workplace

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](#)
- call 0300 790 6787, Monday to Friday 8:30am to 10pm

## 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](#)