

Acas coronavirus advice on returning to work

11 June 2020

Workplace expert, Acas, has updated its coronavirus guidance to cover best practice around how to handle returning to work.

The coronavirus pandemic has seen calls to the Acas helpline increase by a third (34%) when compared to the same period the previous year.

Acas Chief Executive, Susan Clews, said:

"Covid19 has caused a lot of uncertainty in the workplace and our helpline has seen a record increase in calls from employers and employees wanting advice on how to handle changes to their work situation.

"The government's advice is to continue to work from home if possible. But many employers and their staff may be concerned about the practicalities of physically going back to work.

"Some people may also feel that they are unable to go back to work due to health, safety or childcare concerns. Our new advice includes guidance in these areas."

Acas's advice is for employers and their staff to have early discussions about any plans to return to work and try to come to an agreement. These talks can take place with trade union or employee representatives and health and safety representatives, but all staff should be kept informed of plans and be able to feed into discussions.

It is a good idea to talk about:

- when staff might return to the workplace
- how staff will travel to and from work
- how health and safety is being reviewed and managed, including sharing 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 keep 2 metres apart
- if there might be a phased return of the workforce, for example some staff returning before others

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.

Acas's new advice is clear that some people may not feel that they are able to return to work due to worries around catching the virus, childcare responsibilities, or they could be an extremely vulnerable person or live with someone who is. In any of these situations, an employer should listen to staff concerns. Some practical options to consider are:

- arrange for someone to work different hours temporarily to avoid peak time travel
- keep someone on furlough if they are temporarily unable to work
- offer extra car parking where possible so that people can avoid using public transport

If none of these options are possible then it may be possible to take time off as holiday or unpaid leave but an employer does not have to agree to this. If someone refuses to attend work without a valid reason then it could result in disciplinary action.

Non-essential retail shops in England are set to reopen on 15 June. Acas is regularly updating its advice to reflect any new changes to lockdown in Great Britain. The full advice includes proposed changes to employment contracts on returning to work, staff anxious about returning to work and how to raise it as an issue.

[See our guidance on returning to the workplace.](#)

Media enquiries

[Contact the Acas press office.](#)

Background notes

1. The percentage of calls to the Acas helpline were calculated from the total number of calls to the Acas helpline between 1 February and the end of May 2020 increased by 34% when compared to the same period in 2019. This equates to an increase of 115,000 calls.
2. [Read the Government's announcement on the reopening of retail shops.](#)
3. Acas stands for Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service. Acas provides free and impartial information and advice to employers and employees on all aspects of workplace relations and employment law. We support good relationships between employers and employees which underpin business success. We also provide good value, high quality training and tailored advice to employers. Our expertise is based on millions of contacts with employers and employees each year. Acas is an independent and impartial statutory body governed by a Council made up of members from business, trade unions, academia and the law.
4. As part of a new campaign around rights at work during coronavirus, Acas has launched new [workplace rights guidance](#) to help workers know their rights as they return to work.