

Working around COVID-19: new guidance for employers

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Following the Prime Minister's statement on Sunday setting out the plan for easing the lockdown, the Government published sector-specific guidance to help employers to prepare to open and operate their workplaces safely. To assist this return to work, the Government has today announced that it is extending the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme ("CJRS") to October and introducing flexibility from August to assist businesses get people back to work.

In this article we look at both of these developments.

Guidelines

New 'COVID-19 secure' guidelines are available to UK employers to help them get their businesses back up and running and workplaces operating as safely as possible.

The new guidance covers eight workplace settings:

- [Construction and other outdoor work](#)
- [Factories, plants and warehouses](#)
- [Homes](#)
- [Labs and research facilities](#)
- [Offices and contact centres](#)
- [Restaurants offering takeaway or delivery](#)
- [Shops and branches](#)
- [Vehicles.](#)

The Government has stated that it will publish further guidance for other sectors that are not currently open and may also update the current guidance.

The guidance covers a number of common themes across all of the workplace settings, the key points being as follows:

- All employers should carry out a COVID-19 risk assessment.
- Employers need to take preventative measures to reduce risk to the lowest reasonably practicable level and share risk assessment results with workforce.
- Employers should carefully consider who is needed in the workplace? If someone is not needed in the workplace they should be supported to work from home. Employers will also need to protect people at higher risk and those who need to self-isolate.
- Employers need to ensure that workers can observe the 2m social distancing requirement wherever possible. If it is not possible, employers will need to take mitigating actions, such as ensuring there are facilities for handwashing, providing additional screens, appropriate PPE and other measures.
- Employers will need to also consider how they manage their workforce to reduce contact between workers. This may include changing shift patterns or rotas to create smaller, contained teams which work together regularly. Gatherings are permitted if essential for work purposes, but wherever possible should be avoided or minimised. Work times may also be staggered so employees can avoid the rush hour on public transport.
- In order to reduce the risk of infection, businesses should minimise the need for site visits by customers, visitors and contractors, and provide signage about social distancing.
- All the guidance stresses the importance of workplace cleanliness and hygiene, the individual documents also address whether PPE and face coverings are required or should be encouraged. In general workplaces should not encourage the precautionary use of extra PPE to protect against COVID-19 outside clinical settings or when responding to a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19. Wearing a face covering is optional and is not required by law, however, employers should support their workers in using face coverings safely if they choose to wear one.

These guidelines are just the starting point for employers who will need to commence discussions with their workforce around the issues surrounding returning to the workplace. Employers will need to deal sensitively with employees and unions

regarding their concerns and be prepared to negotiate and compromise to ensure employees feel safe to return.

CJRS extension - key points:

- The CJRS will be extended, for four months, from the end of June until the end of October.
- There will be no changes to the current scheme until the end of July.
- From August to the end of October, there will be greater flexibility with part time working permissible. This is something which had been requested by both unions and employer bodies.
- Workers will continue to receive the same level of support as they do now i.e. 80% of their salary, up to £2,500. However, from August employers will be asked to pay a percentage towards the salaries of their furloughed staff. It is not clear at this time what percentage the employer will be asked to contribute - it may be a set amount or more likely it will increase in increments over the three months, August-October.

Further guidance is expected at the end of this month and we will, of course, continue to keep you updated.

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