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COVID-19 Return to Work Health and Safety Guidance Manual (Wales)

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Introduction

This guide is aimed at all employers and those who are self-employed and work with or near other people. It explains how you can protect people from Coronavirus (COVID-19) in your workplace.

All employers have a duty of care to protect anyone affected by their activities and as such, must identify foreseeable hazards and establish a plan to eliminate and control the hazards.

The guidance sets out the main elements required to achieve this, identifying the following key stages (templates are provided to assist you):

- **Identifying people at risk.**
- **Examining the working environment.**
- **Collating the information, assessing the risk and establishing safe systems of work.**



The approach uses the principles set out in current [Welsh Government COVID-19 Workplace Guidance](#) for employers and businesses in Wales, which is focused on the following key points that should be implemented as soon as it is practical:

1. Work From Home - If You Can

Having employees working from home remains a reasonable precaution that should be considered by employers as part of the risk assessment. However, for those who cannot work from home, employees should go to work, ensuring that adequate risk controls are in place to safeguard them in the workplace.

2. Carry Out a COVID-19 Risk Assessment, in Consultation With Workers or Trade Unions

This guidance operates within current health and safety employment and equalities legislation and employers will need to carry out COVID-19 risk assessments in consultation with their workers or trade unions to establish what guidelines to put in place. Employers should publish the results of their risk assessments on their website.

3. Managing the Transmission Risk

Although the requirement for 2 metre social distancing is not included as a legal requirement under Alert Level 0 in Wales, employers should continue to provide workspaces to allow for distancing of people to minimise close contact, such as staggering start times, creating one-way walk-throughs, opening more entrances and exits, or changing seating layouts in break rooms.

In addition to distancing, precautions should be considered, such as providing adequate levels of ventilation in work areas, providing physical barriers in shared spaces, creating workplace shift patterns or fixed teams minimising the number of people in contact with one another, or ensuring colleagues are facing away from each other.

4. Where Members of the Public Attend the Workplace

If members of the public attend an indoor space in the workplace, face coverings must be worn, unless the person is medically exempt or a child under the age of 11. [Welsh Government guidance on indoor face coverings](#) details the responsibilities to ensure these measures are reasonably applied.

5. Reinforcing Cleaning Processes

Workplaces should be cleaned more frequently, paying close attention to high-contact objects like door handles and keyboards. Employers should provide handwashing facilities or hand sanitisers at entry and exit points.

For information relating to COVID-19 workplace safety in England, [please click here](#).

Current UK Government Workplace Guidance

In addition to the Welsh Government Workplace Guidance, the UK Government has issued sector-specific [COVID-19 Workplace Guides](#) to help employers, employees and the self-employed understand how to work safely during the Coronavirus pandemic.

These guides cover a range of different types of work. Many businesses operate more than one type of workplace, such as an office, factory and fleet of vehicles. You may need to use more than one of these guides as you think through what you need to do to keep people safe:

- 1. Shops, branches and close contact services:** for people who work in or run shops, branches, stores or similar environments and for people who provide close contact services, including hairdressers, barbers, beauticians, tattooists, sports and massage therapists, dress fitters, tailors and fashion designers.
- 2. Construction and other outdoor work:** for people who work in or run outdoor working environments.
- 3. Offices, factories, labs and warehouses:** Guidance for people who work in or run offices, factories, labs and research facilities, plants, warehouses and similar indoor environments.
- 4. Hotels and other guest accommodation:** for people who work in or run hotels and other guest accommodation.
- 5. Restaurants, pubs, bars, nightclubs and takeaway services:** for people who work in or run restaurants, pubs, bars, cafes, nightclubs or takeaways.
- 6. Events and attractions:** for people who work in settings related to events and visitor attractions.

There is also different guidance for:

- **Grassroot sport participants, providers and facility operators**
- **Schools, further education and childcare providers**
- **Wedding and civil partnership ceremonies, receptions and celebrations**
- **Vehicles**

In Wales, specific guidance has also been produced for those in the following industries/workplaces:

- **Retail**
- **Manufacturing**
- **Food and meat plants**
- **Sport, recreation and leisure**
- **Creative industries**
- **Vehicles**
- **Forestry**
- **Toilets for public use**
- **Places of worship**
- **Culture and heritage destinations and venues**
- **Construction and outdoor work**

- Labs and research facilities
- Children's soft play and indoor play centres
- Animal businesses, rescue and rehoming
- Hair, beauty, holistic, tattoo and body piercing services
- Acupuncture, clinical and sports therapy services
- Performing arts
- Events
- Tourism and hospitality

For further information, please visit: <https://gov.wales/business-and-employers-coronavirus>

Each business will need to translate this into the specific actions it needs to take, depending on the nature of their business, including the size and type of business, how it is organised, operated, managed and regulated. To help you decide which actions to take, you need to carry out an appropriate COVID-19 risk assessment, just as you would for other health and safety-related hazards. This risk assessment must be done in consultation with unions or workers.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has also issued guidance to assist businesses in fulfilling their legal duties: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/index.htm>

Test, Trace and Protect

[The Welsh Government Test, Trace and Protect \(TTP\) strategy](#) has been issued in conjunction with the wider UK Government approach via the NHS COVID-19 app guidance.

If an employee develops symptoms of Coronavirus, they should take a Coronavirus test within the first five days of developing symptoms – this is when the test is most effective. If they test positive, they are required to share details of people (including those they live with) that they have been in close contact with, including:

1. Someone you have had face-to face contact with at a distance of less than 1 metre – this could be someone that you've had a face-to-face-conversation with, had skin-to-skin physical contact with, have coughed on or had some other form of contact with within 1 metre for 1 minute or longer;
2. Someone who has been within 2 metres of you for more than 15 minutes (one off or cumulative);
3. Someone you have travelled in a car or other small vehicle with – or someone who has been seated near you on public transport, such as a train or an aeroplane.

This information will help the contact tracing teams to identify how quickly the virus is spreading and whether there are hotspots of infection. It is an offence to give false information to TTP about persons you have been in contact with, including where this is done to either fraudulently claim support payments or to maliciously require a person to self-isolate. Contacts will be informed that they have been in contact with a positive case and must self-isolate if they have not been fully vaccinated. Those who have received both doses of the vaccine will not be required to isolate if identified as a close contact, unless they develop symptoms or test positive.

Close contacts will typically only be advised to take a test if they are displaying symptoms.

Coronavirus Vaccination Strategy

The vaccination strategy has been based on the prevention of mortality and the maintenance of the health and social care systems. As the risk of mortality from COVID-19 increases with age, Phase 1 of the vaccination programme was primarily based on age. Phase 2 was aimed at offering all first doses to all eligible adults in Wales by the end of July. Public Health Wales' COVID-19 vaccination guidance details the strategy for the vaccination program for Wales.

Phase 3 of the programme in Wales will include:

- **Booster vaccinations for priority groups**
- **Second dose for younger cohorts who received their first dose in the later part of Phase 2**
- **Re-offering the first dose to communities whereby people have yet to receive their first dose**
- **Acting upon any recommendations for vaccinating young people (aged 12-15)**
- **Launch of new online booking system for vaccine appointments**

There are currently no requirements for those who have received the vaccine to carry a vaccine card or similar evidence, unless in specified circumstances, such as international travel. Employers are not currently obliged to force staff to receive the vaccine. However, employers must continue to protect any vulnerable workers through their existing COVID-19 risk control precautions.

Once employees have received the vaccine, employees must still follow the existing precautions until new guidance is produced that details any new approach to managing COVID-19 in the workplace.

Obtaining information on employee vaccination status must be in line with GDPR. An employer's reasons for recording their employees' vaccination status must be clear and compelling. Employers should not record the data on a "just in case" basis. Relevant factors include the sector the employer operates in, the type of work undertaken by staff and the particular health and safety risks in its workplace. [Click here for further information](#)



Consultation

You must consult, cooperate and coordinate with your employees and other businesses you work with or share premises with about how they will discharge their duties when they interact with your employees. To do this, you should exchange information to find out who is doing what. For example:

- Talk to your suppliers about how to safely manage deliveries.
- Talk to other businesses that share your worksite or premises about how to manage shared areas, such as lifts, bathroom and kitchen facilities.
- Talk to other businesses that share your worksite or premises about what you will do if there is a case or suspected case of COVID-19 at the worksite or premises.
- Talk to other businesses you interact with, for example, the onsite food van or the contract cleaner.
- Work together in a cooperative and coordinated way to eliminate or minimise risks so far as is reasonably practicable (e.g. how to manage shared areas, such as lifts and bathroom facilities).

Training should be given to ensure that all staff understand the new risks. This need not take long, but should include details about current distancing requirements, routes of transmission and the importance of hand washing and surface disinfection at key times. All staff should be instructed about not coming to work if they have a fever or new cough. They should stay at home for seven days (or for as long as prevailing guidance dictates).

Temperature Checking – Is It Required?

You may want to monitor the health of your workers through administering temperature checks as a preventative measure in managing a COVID-19 outbreak in your workplace. However, for many workplaces, there may be little benefit in conducting temperature checks on workers or others. This is because temperature checks will not tell you whether a person has COVID-19. It will only identify symptoms. It is possible that a person may be asymptomatic or be on medication that reduces their temperature. It is also possible that the person may have a temperature for another reason unrelated to COVID-19.

You should implement well published precautions, such as good hygiene measures, physical distancing, workplace cleaning and personal protective equipment (PPE) rather than only relying on temperature checks. You should also require workers to tell you if they are feeling unwell, including if they have a fever and require them to go home when they do.

Before administering temperature checks:

- Seek the advice of your local health authority on the appropriate method of temperature checking, equipment, PPE and control measures required to ensure safe testing.
- Consult with your workers and their health and safety representatives, and take their views into account.
- Provide instruction to all workers on the process for temperature checks, including emphasising the importance of maintaining the other control measures.

Hand Hygiene

You must direct your employees, visitors and others in the workplace to practice good hygiene while at the workplace. Good hygiene requires everyone to wash their hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and dry them completely, preferably with clean, single-use paper towels.

Hand Washing

All staff must wash their hands when leaving home and then when arriving at work immediately upon arrival, as well as before handling or eating food or after blowing noses, coughing or sneezing, or going to the toilet.

Duty managers/the appropriate person should remind everyone to wash their hands or use a hand gel at the start of every shift. That way any virus particles picked up on the way to work are removed before they can be spread to others either via direct contact or by touching hand contact surfaces (door handles, tables, kettle handles, kitchen equipment etc.)

If used, hand sanitiser needs to be anti-viral and at least 60% ethanol content.

Paper towels should be provided in all hand wash stations as they can reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 by drying the hands more thoroughly than hand dryers (hand dryers may also spread the air borne virus).

If you provide single use paper towels at your workplace, remember:

- The paper towels should be replenished as required.
- Used paper towels should be disposed of in a waste bin that is regularly emptied to keep the area clean, tidy and safe.

Waste (including used paper towels) should be double bagged and set aside in a safe place for at least 72 hours before disposal into general waste facilities. For further information regarding cleaning, please refer to [Workplace guidance for employers and employees: COVID-19 | GOV.WALES](#)

The Wearing of Face Coverings in the Workplace

Current Welsh Government guidance on indoor face coverings details the responsibilities to ensure face coverings are worn by any person in an indoor area, open to the public (with the exception of hospitality). Managers and those in control of premises are required, by regulation, to take all reasonable measures to minimise the risk of exposure to Coronavirus on their premises. They have a part to play in keeping people safe.

Employers will also be required to mandate the use of face coverings in other indoor workplaces where social distancing cannot be maintained, unless there are strong reasons not to. Employees may therefore be required to wear a face covering at work, even in places which are not open to the public. In premises which are only partly open to the public, face coverings are not mandatory in those parts which are not open to the public.

This would, for example, cover those parts of shops, gyms or museums which are only for staff.

The legal obligation for members of the public to wear face coverings is held by the members of the public and those working in the premises. There are several exemptions for members of the public to this new legal requirement, which must be carefully managed and monitored by workplace managers. These are:

1. Children under 11
2. While eating or drinking
3. Where there is a reasonable excuse not to wear a face covering, such as:
 - you are not able to put on or to wear a face covering because of a physical or mental illness, or because of a disability or impairment;
 - you are accompanying somebody who relies on lip reading where they need to communicate; or
 - you are escaping from a threat or danger and do not have a face covering;
 - to take medication;
 - to remove a face covering to avoid harm or injury, either to yourself or others – for example to get somebody's attention about a danger.

Managers and those in control of premises open to the public should provide clear information. Examples of this include:

1. Company websites must detail specific information on wearing face coverings as part of the conditions of entering and may provide links to other useful websites – for example, showing how to make a face covering and this guidance on how to wear a face covering properly.
2. Notices advising on the requirement to wear face coverings should be displayed in a prominent place (in both Welsh and English, and other community languages as relevant), whenever feasible.
3. Information may be given orally, or in written form. Managers should consider the most efficient way of ensuring that all customers are made aware of the requirement in the circumstances of the particular location.
4. Managers will want to consider the diverse needs of visitors to their premises and should consider whether the information should be made available in different formats, for example for people with sight or hearing impairment and, if necessary, in other languages.

The manager or premises controller are not expected to take enforcement action where a member of the public is not wearing, or refuses to wear a face covering. However, if circumstances necessitate it, they may wish to call the Police to report the issue. It is an offence not to wear a face covering in indoor premises open to the public unless an exemption applies or a person has a reasonable excuse for not doing so.

Both the police and local authorities have powers to enforce the requirements on businesses, services and workplaces imposed by the new regulations. However, the enforcement approach will be superseded by the approach to:

1. Promote and maintain sustained compliance as a preventative measure to help contain the Coronavirus;
2. Ensure action is taken immediately to deal with situations in which there is a risk of Coronavirus spreading; and
3. Ensure that those who fail to comply are held to account.

For face covering guidance in England, please visit:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings

First Aid and Emergency Procedures

During the Coronavirus pandemic, First Aider responders may come into contact with people of unknown medical history/symptoms. Therefore, there is a risk of cross infection when administering First Aid, including that of Coronavirus, unless precautions are taken. Although social distancing is no longer a legal requirement in the move to Alert Level 0, it would still be best practice to encourage distancing whenever possible.

If someone shows signs of Coronavirus, keep them 2 metres away unless wearing PPE. Provide them with a mask and keep others away. Their line manager should make arrangements for them to go home and keep them isolated in the agreed site isolation area until they leave site.

If the patient is significantly unwell, e.g. extremely short of breath, contact the site emergency services 999 and advise them of the potential Coronavirus situation.

PPE should be kept close to the point of access/use, ideally in a 'grab bag' with a copy of this guidance. It is for single use only and must be changed after each First Aid intervention and not used between patients.

Based on the requirement that distancing of >2m cannot be maintained whilst providing First Aid, the following PPE must be worn as a minimum:

- Disposable gloves.
- Face Mask – type FFP2.
- Disposable plastic apron or disposable coveralls.
- Eye protection.
- Clinical waste bag.

Provision of alcohol hand rub and masks for patients are also advised.

First Aiders are not expected to and should not try to diagnose medical conditions. However, you have a duty to minimise the risk of workers and others in the workplace being exposed to COVID-19, so far as reasonably practicable.

If you reasonably suspect someone has the virus or has been exposed, this creates a health risk at your workplace and you will need to follow the steps below. Do not wait until confirmation that a worker has COVID-19. You must act promptly to take reasonable steps to manage risks.

This information is provided to assist you in the workplace. However, you must always follow the advice of Public Health England/Wales/Scotland.

You must only make a report under RIDDOR (<https://www.hse.gov.uk/news/riddor-reporting-coronavirus.htm>) when:

- An unintended incident at work has led to someone's possible or actual exposure to Coronavirus. This must be reported as a dangerous occurrence.
- A worker has been diagnosed as having COVID-19 and there is reasonable evidence that it was caused by exposure at work. This must be reported as a case of disease.
- A worker dies as a result of occupational exposure to Coronavirus.

Steps to Take When the Person You Are Concerned About Is at the Workplace

If someone is confirmed as having COVID-19 or is getting tested for COVID-19, they should already be at home. However, there may be circumstances where a person in your workplace is displaying COVID-like symptoms or shares information (e.g. they have been in close contact with someone that has the virus) that causes you to have reasonable concerns about their health and the health of others in your workplace. The person could be a worker, a client, customer or other visitor to your premises. Where this occurs:

1. Isolate the Person

Individuals must self-isolate if:

- Someone is symptomatic (regardless of vaccine status) until a negative PCR test result has been provided.
- Someone tests positive on a PCR test (regardless of vaccine status).
- They have been identified as a close contact of a positive case and have not both doses of the vaccine.

(Note: Employers may not be aware of vaccination status and therefore should instruct anyone identified as a close contact to isolate in accordance with government guidelines based on their vaccination status. Vaccination status information must not be held unless there is legitimate reason to hold such health data and must be held in accordance with GDPR.)

If the person has serious symptoms, such as difficulty breathing, call 999 for urgent medical assistance. Otherwise, you must take steps to prevent the person from potentially spreading the virus by isolating them from others. You must also provide appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) to the affected person, such as a disposable surgical mask, hand sanitiser and tissues, if available. Also provide protection to anyone assisting the person.

2. Seek Advice and Assess the Risks

Next, to determine if it is reasonable to suspect the person may have COVID-19, talk to the person about your concerns and see what they say.

Seek NHS Wales advice: <https://111.wales.nhs.uk/> or UK Government advice: <https://111.nhs.uk/covid-19/>. You can also contact the NHS Direct on 111 for general advice, or 999 for Emergency Services.

Ensure that you have current contact details for the person and make a note about the areas they have been in the workplace, who they have been in close contact with and for how long. This will inform you about risks to others and areas to clean and disinfect. This information may also assist local authorities or Public Health Wales/UK if they need to follow up with you at a later time.

3. Transport

Ensure the person has transport home, to a location where they can isolate or to a medical facility if necessary. Wherever possible, if a person is unwell or travelling to a location for mandatory isolation, they should use a personal mode of transport to minimise exposure to others. They should not use public transport unless there is no other option.

If the person needs to use a taxi or public transport, then the person should avoid contact with others, including the driver to the extent possible. This includes:

- Wearing a surgical mask, if available.
- Avoiding direct contact with the driver, including sitting in the back seat to achieve as much separation as is reasonably possible.
- Practicing good hand hygiene and cough/sneeze hygiene.
- Paying by card.

4. Clean and Disinfect

Close off the affected areas and do not let others use or enter them until they have been cleaned and disinfected, or until 72 hours has passed. Open outside doors and windows if possible, to increase air flow.

All areas used by the person concerned, for example offices, toilets, kitchens and common areas and equipment or PPE, must then be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected. Further information on how to clean and disinfect can be found at :

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings>.

Cleaners must wear appropriate PPE, for example disposable gloves or gloves appropriate to the cleaning chemicals being used, and safety eyewear to protect against chemical splashes. If there is visible contamination with respiratory secretions or other body fluids in the area, the cleaners should also wear a disposable apron.

5. Identify and Inform Close Contacts

You must consider who the affected person may have had recent close contact with. If instructed by health officials, tell close contacts that they may have been exposed to COVID-19 and the requirements for quarantine based on vaccine status. You must maintain the privacy of all individuals involved.

Seek information about the areas that close contacts have been in the workplace, who they have been in close contact within the workplace and for how long. This will inform you about possible risks to others, and additional areas that may also need to be cleaned and disinfected.

6. Review Risk Management Controls

Review your COVID-19 risk assessment and precautions, in consultation with your workers and their representatives, and assess and decide whether any changes or additional control measures are required.

You must continue to meet your duty of care to eliminate or minimise, so far as is reasonably practicable, the risk of workers and others in the workplace (such as customers) contracting COVID-19.

Workers who have been isolated after having tested positive for COVID-19 can return to work when they have fully recovered and have met the criteria for clearance from isolation.

Workers do not need medical clearance to return to work if:

- They have completed the quarantine period (e.g. after returning from travel, where applicable).
- They have completed their self-isolation (e.g. after testing positive, developing symptoms or being identified as a close contact with a confirmed case).
- They did not develop symptoms during isolation.
- You should not ask these workers to be tested for COVID-19 in order to return to work.

Ventilation and Air Movement

Poorly ventilated premises will potentially expose occupants to a higher concentration of airborne pathogens, and the risk will increase with a greater amount of time spent in such an environment.

The risk of airborne C19 infection to staff and customers can be reduced by:

1. Minimise the numbers of people inside the premises at any one time.
2. Ensure working areas have a natural air flow where possible – keep windows and ventilation points open as much as possible.
3. Reducing risk of contact spread through regular handwashing, surface cleaning and reducing deposition of infectious particles.

General advice is to increase the air supply and exhaust ventilation, supplying as much outside air as is reasonably possible. The underlying principle is to dilute and remove airborne pathogens as much as possible, exhausting them to the outside air and reducing the chance that they can become deposited on surfaces or inhaled by room users.

Recirculation/transfer of air from one room to another should be avoided unless this is the only way of providing adequately high ventilation to all occupied rooms.

In areas and zones where there is no direct supply of outside air then consideration should be given to prohibiting access to these spaces by building users, especially where it is likely that they would be occupying such a space for considerable lengths of time (longer than 30 minutes).

This may include basement rooms or storage areas which rely on infiltration of air from other spaces. The key actions are:

1. Understand your ventilation system
2. Run your ventilation at higher volume flow rate; this may require changes to CO2 set points (for both mechanical ventilation and automated windows)
3. Avoid recirculation/transfer of air from one room to another unless this is the only way of providing adequately high ventilation to all occupied rooms
4. Recirculation of air within a single room through the use of ceiling and desk fans, where this is complemented by an outdoor air supply, is acceptable where no other form of ventilation is possible.

If you are unsure, seek the advice of your heating ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) engineer or adviser.

Deliveries, Contractors and Visitors Attending the Workplace

- Non-essential visits to the workplace should be cancelled or postponed.
- Contact your delivery suppliers and understand what systems are in place for identifying if their employees are unwell and what actions are taken.
- Develop a plan for deliveries to minimise the interaction of delivery drivers with workers and customers and communicate this to delivery suppliers, drivers and employees.
- Minimise the number of workers attending to deliveries and contractors as much as possible.
- Delivery drivers and other contractors who need to attend the workplace to provide maintenance or repair services or perform other essential activities should be given clear instructions of your requirements while they are on site.
- Ensure handwashing facilities, or if not possible, alcohol-based hand sanitiser, is readily available for workers after physically handling deliveries.
- Direct visiting delivery drivers and contractors to remain in vehicles and use contactless methods, such as mobile phones to communicate with your workers wherever possible.
- Direct visiting delivery drivers and contractors to use alcohol-based hand sanitiser before handling products being delivered.
- Use and ask delivery drivers and contractors to use electronic paperwork where possible to minimise physical interaction. Where possible, set up alternatives to requiring signatures. For instance, see whether a confirmation email or a photo of the loaded or unloaded goods can be accepted as proof of delivery or collection (as applicable). If a pen or other utensil is required for signature you can ask that the pen or utensil is cleaned or sanitised before use. For pens, you may wish to use your own.

Downloads

[Download COVID-19 Employee Workplace Checklist](#)

[Download COVID-19 Workplace Checklist](#)

[Download COVID-19 Risk Assessment Guidance and Template](#)

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