GUIDANCE, DOCUMENT

Public health advice for employers, businesses and organisations: coronavirus

How businesses, employers, organisations, activity and events organisers in Wales can reduce public health risks.

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Contents

Context and overview

This public health advice applies to Wales and is aimed at all workplaces, organisations and premises (including transport operators).

Whilst this advice does cover public health control measures that could be implemented to reduce the risk of transmission, it is intended to be used as a guide for safely mitigating against the most common communicable diseases including COVID-19, flu and norovirus.

The requirements that were in law have been removed. However, COVID-19 still remains a concern for public health. For this reason, it remains important to consider what they can be done to reduce the spread of the virus, and protect workers and customers, including any additional protections for those who are more vulnerable, including the immunosuppressed or those who live with someone who is vulnerable. we strongly recommend you risk assess your premises and take sensible precautions and actions to reduce the risk of transmission.

With increasing numbers of people vaccinated and thanks to everyone's continued efforts, coronavirus specific legal requirements no longer apply. The risks from coronavirus should now be considered in the same context as other communicable diseases risks (for example flu and norovirus).

Covered in the advice

This public health advice does not replace business and employer statutory responsibilities and it is important you continue to comply with your legal obligations relating to **Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974**, **Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992**, Construction (Design and

Management) Regulations 2015, **Equality Act 2010** and any other employment regulations.

This advice covers public health control measures (previously referred to as "reasonable measures") which have been effective in mitigating risks during the pandemic.

This includes:

- sufficient ventilation
- robust cleaning and personal hygiene practices
- regular training
- physical distancing
- enabling **working from home**
- exclusion of symptomatic individuals and those who have tested positive for coronavirus
- supporting vaccine take up

Risk assessment

You are no longer legally required to conduct a specific coronavirus risk assessment. You should consider the risks associated with coronavirus alongside other communicable diseases including flu and norovirus.

However, as coronavirus has not gone away, you can continue to conduct a specific coronavirus risk assessment if this works best for your circumstances.

This public health advice does not cover risk assessments in detail. Comprehensive guidance on general workplace risk assessments is available from the **Health and Safety Executive.**

Legal position in relation to health and safety in the workplace

Employers have a general **legal responsibility to maintain the health and safety and welfare of workers, and others attending their premises (on hse.gov.uk)**. HSE no longer expects every business to consider COVID-19 in their risk assessment or to have specific measures in place. Employers may still choose to continue to cover COVID-19 in their risk assessments.

We do however advise all businesses, employers and event organisers to continue to implement effective public health control measures to protect your workers, contractors, visitors and customers*.* Businesses and employers can determine which public health control measures identified in this advice should be applied in their premises.

A checklist has been provided as an aid to support you in making decisions as to which control measures are proportionate in your circumstances.

Doing so is not only in the best interests of your staff, contractors and visitors, but also in the best interests of your business. Keeping your workforce safe and healthy helps reduce risks of lower productivity and sickness absence which would have financial implications.

Employers that specifically work with coronavirus, such as in laboratories or health and social care workers caring for infectious patients, must continue to undertake a risk assessment that considers coronavirus, under The Control Of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (COSHH) 2002. Further information can be found at: **Coronavirus (COVID-19) – Advice for workplaces (hse.gov.uk)**.

COSHH Regulations 2002 do not cover general work place transmission from one worker to another (only where occupational risks are created in the

workplace or by work activity).

Employers should continue to comply with the requirements for cleaning, ventilation and welfare facilities in the **Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992** or the **Construction Design and Management Regulations 2015** to control occupational health and safety risks.

Employers have a duty to consult with their employees, or their representatives, on health and safety matters. Further information is available at **Consulting and involving your workers**.

Arrangements to enforce health and safety law in workplaces with regard to controlling risks that are directly created by the work activity will be undertaken by Health and Safety Executive and local authorities as they always have been.

Public health control measures

Whilst the following public health control measures are not required by law (in so far as reducing the risk of transmitting communicable diseases are concerned), we are advising businesses, employers and event organisers to consider continuing to implement them wherever practical to do so. We know, from experience gained both pre-pandemic and during the pandemic, that they are effective mitigations against a range of communicable diseases including coronavirus, flu and norovirus.

It is recognised that it may not be reasonably practicable for all businesses and employers to implement all of the below public health control measures (for example, not everyone can work from home). We do however ask you to consider the range of public health control measures and implement them where reasonably practicable to do so.

These public health control measures are not new and therefore they should be familiar to everyone as they have been used as a means to minimise exposure to and spread of coronavirus throughout the pandemic.

As stated above, a safe and healthy workforce will ensure productivity continues. Implementing all or just some of the below public health control measures, in addition to those required in law, could potentially reduce sickness absence rates associated with communicable diseases.

Set out below are some of the most effective public health control measures that should be considered and put in place where possible to mitigate against exposure to or spread of any communicable disease, not specific just coronavirus:

- sufficient ventilation
- robust cleaning, personal hygiene and hand washing practices
- regular training
- working from home
- the exclusion of symptomatic individuals
- supporting vaccination uptake

Sufficient ventilation

Providing sufficient ventilation is a particularly important measure when mitigating against risk of exposure to or spread of communicable diseases, this is particularly relevant to controlling respiratory infections. Carrying out activities outdoors will provide natural ventilation. Natural ventilation indoors might be provided by opening doors and windows where this does not contravene fire safety requirements. If your mechanical ventilation needs improvements, making those improvements will also help minimise risks if done effectively.

Ventilation can work in combination with other measures such as restricting or

reducing duration of activities and enhanced use of face coverings in settings with higher risk of aerosol transmission.

It is important to identify and deal with areas that are not well ventilated. The more people occupying an area that is poorly ventilated, and the longer they remain in it, the greater the risk of spread of any communicable disease.

You can bring fresh air into a space by:

- natural ventilation
- mechanical ventilation
- a combination of natural and mechanical ventilation.

You should consider the following:

- effective fresh air ventilation, working alongside distancing and enhanced hygiene regimes
- restricting or reducing duration of activities indoors
- room layout
- using rooms with good ventilation and avoiding or minimise the use of those without
- assessing levels of ventilation with monitoring devices (such as carbon dioxide detectors) and acting to remedy any problems identified
- making sure mechanical ventilation systems are maintained in line with manufacturers' instructions
- avoiding ventilation which only recycles air
- if table or pedestal fans are unavoidable, ensuring that air is not blown from one person (or groups of people) to another person (or group of people) by regularly bringing in air from outside by opening windows or doors. You should not use table or pedestal fans if ventilation is inadequate.
- using ceiling fans and fresh air to improve the circulation of air from outside and avoid pockets of stagnant air forming indoors.

Employers should provide workers with clear guidance on ventilation and why it is important, as well as instruction on how to achieve and maintain good natural ventilation or to operate systems if there are user controls which workers can access.

Further advice and guidance for employers, building managers and those who are responsible for workplaces, non-domestic public buildings can be found below:

- **Ventilation in the workplace (hse.gov.uk)**
- **Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers**
- **The Building Engineers Services Association**
- **REHVA**
- **Royal Academy of Engineering**
- **Identifying poorly ventilated areas and using CO2 monitors (on hse.gov.uk)**
- **TM40: health and wellbeing in building services (on cibse.org)**
- **EMG and SPI-B: application of CO2 monitoring as an approach to managing ventilation to mitigate SARS-CoV-2 transmission, 27 May 2021 - GOV.UK (on GOV.UK)**
- **EMG: role of ventilation in controlling SARS-CoV-2 transmission (on GOV.UK)**

Robust cleaning, personal hygiene and hand washing practices

Effective and timely cleaning and disinfection is an important principle of infection prevention and control and will help minimise the onward transmission of communicable diseases particularly norovirus. A cleaning schedule should include details of cleaning methods (dilution rates and contact times), chemicals to be used, frequency of cleaning the environment and equipment. Hand contact surfaces such as door handles, taps, light switches and push pads and toilets

which present a greater transmission risk should be cleaned and disinfected as frequently as is practical to do.

Washing hands with soap and water, or regularly using hand sanitiser when there is no access to soap and water, helps stop viruses spreading, this is one of the most important control measures in helping to reduce the spread of any communicable disease. Our hands touch many surfaces throughout the day, and this can help viruses to move around. If a person has a virus on their hands, you can transfer it to other surfaces or to your eyes, nose or mouth. This is one way that viruses can enter your body and infect people. Washing or sanitising hands removes viruses and other germs, so a person is less likely to spread them to other people or to become infected.

To support thorough and regular handwashing, washing facilities should have running hot and cold or warm water, soap and clean towels or other means of cleaning or drying. If required by the type of work, showers should also be provided.

Training

It is important that everyone involved in a workplace or business activity is aware of the importance of implementing a proportionate level of public health control measures to help reduce the transmission of infection.

Information, instruction and an appropriate level of training will support the robust implementation of those controls and help to protect everyone. Even a small amount of training will provide participants with the knowledge and skills they need to implement the public health measures adopted in their workplace or business activity.

Working from home

The most effective way of minimising the risk of exposure to any communicable disease in workplaces is to enable some or all staff to work from home, as often as possible, particularly during high prevalence periods (such as autumn/winter).

It is recognised that home working is not always an option, whether that be due to business need or due to personal circumstances of staff that would make working from home impractical.

Enabling people to work from home and making necessary adjustments may be identified as a public health control measure. This could, for example include issuing staff with IT equipment (laptops, monitors, keyboards), office furniture, mobile phones and facilitating communication across locations.

Remember, as an employer, you have the same health and safety responsibilities for people working at home as for any other worker. Detailed guidance can be found on the **HSE website.**

Employers who are considering requiring their staff to return to workplace settings should first assess whether alternative arrangements could meet the majority of business needs in order to minimise the risk of exposure to or spread of communicable diseases. This should be discussed with trade unions where they are present or with the workforce and their representatives.

In determining whether to ask staff to return to workplace settings after a period of home working, employers should also consider whether an individual's wellbeing would be particularly adversely affected by this. This includes those previously on the Shielding Patients List (including people whose immune system means they are higher risk of serious illness from COVID-19 despite vaccination), or because returning to the workplace would cause them severe anxiety.

Equally, there may be staff who wish to return to workplace settings or do not wish to work from home at any point. In these circumstances, the wellbeing of staff is a relevant consideration.

Exclusion of symptomatic individuals and individuals who have communicable diseases

The most effective way of preventing the spread any communicable disease in any premises is to prevent the virus being present in the first place.

Employers should consider what action they should take if a staff member is displaying any symptoms of a communicable disease (such as flu, coronavirus or norovirus) or have tested positive for coronavirus.

In some circumstances, it may be reasonable to take measures to require or enable such a person to not be present at premises. Whether or not this is reasonable will depend on a number of factors, including, in relation to whether it is feasible for the work to be carried out from home (also see the public health advice above on working from home;) the risk the worker could pose to other workers, including those who were previously on the Shielding Patients List; the type of activity they undertake, especially if they are in direct contact with vulnerable workers, visitors, clients or customers should they continue to work at the premises.

Vaccination

Vaccination remains a critical part of our response to coronavirus and is the most important thing an individual can do to protect themselves and others. Vaccines have been developed quickly and safely during the pandemic, saved thousands of lives, and significantly weakened the link between the infection, serious disease, hospitalisations and death. This is why it is so important for

everyone who is eligible to take up the offer of a vaccine and ensure they have the protection it offers from current and future variants.

Flu can be very serious. Like coronvirus, it is caused by a virus and it can lead to illnesses such as bronchitis and pneumonia, which may need treatment in hospital. Flu is more likely to be serious for workers with a long term health condition, are pregnant, or are older. The people at high risk of coronavirus are generally the same people at increased risk of becoming very ill with flu. Every year, hundreds of people are admitted to hospital or intensive care units with flu. Having a flu vaccine every year is one of the most effective ways to protect against flu.

Employers should consider promoting the benefits of vaccination and encourage staff, where they are able to, to take up the offer (including any boosters) when they are invited to do so.

You should consider enabling staff to take time off for their vaccination appointments. This will help protect the individual, their colleagues and the wider community.

Vulnerable workers

Disabled workers and workers with health conditions

Under **The Equality Act 2010**, employers have a legal duty to make reasonable adjustments to make sure disabled workers or workers with health conditions are not substantially disadvantaged in the workplace.

You should discuss any requirements, including **reasonable adjustments** that may be required for disabled workers and workers with health conditions.

You are strongly advised to complete **the workforce risk assessment tool** with your worker to identify any personal risk factors. This tool can also suggest reasonable adjustments that can be implemented to help your worker to stay safe.

Pregnant workers

Employers should adopt an individualised approach for pregnant workers through the occupational health risk assessment process.

Discussions with pregnant workers should take place at an early stage so you can co-produce the risk assessment, keeping it under review throughout the pregnancy to ensure appropriate mitigations are put in place in a timely manner.

Vaccination against coronavirus continues to be extremely important in providing protection for pregnant workers and should be promoted as part of this process. This also applies to other vaccine preventable diseases, especially flu.

In undertaking the risk assessment process, alongside the individual's vaccination status, the Occupational Health process will need to consider the relevance of any underlying health conditions, and the employee's specific role.

If as part of this process, it is determined that a pregnant employee could not continue in their current role or reasonably be assigned other dutiesemployers should suspend pregnant workers on full pay. This is in line with normal requirements.

See further advice on health and safety for pregnant workers from HSE.

Other public health control measures

Keeping records of staff or visitors

Keeping records of staff or visitors who have been on site at any particular time or date in order to inform them that they may have come into contact with someone who either has developed symptoms of a communicable diseases (including flu, coronavirus or norovirus) or have tested positive for coronavirus is an example of a mitigating measure that businesses have used in their coronavirus response. Such actions could now be considered as part of their ongoing measures to help minimise the risk of and control the spread of any communicable diseases at those settings. This would help minimise further spread of a communicable disease, as those notified could take extra precautions, especially if they are in contact with vulnerable people, including those who were previously on the Shielding Patient list.

Businesses should be transparent that they are collecting the information for contact tracing. Any personal data you collect must be securely stored and only used for the purposes stated in your privacy notice; for example, data collected specifically for communicable disease control cannot be used for marketing purposes. Personal data must not be kept for longer than absolutely necessary and must be securely disposed of (or deleted) 21 days from the date of each separate instance in which a person has been on the premises would enable contact tracing, should it be required. You can find more detailed information on data protection and manageable steps you can take to comply at **(ICO) Guidance** and **Keeping records of staff, customers, and visitors: Test, Trace, Protect**.

Face coverings

Face coverings are no longer required by law in any indoor public place.

Businesses, employers and event organisers may wish to request requiring their staff, visitors and customers to wear a face covering when on their premises, even though they are not legally required. It is also important to be respectful of those who are unable to wear a face covering and other people's choices, whether they choose to wear a face covering or not.

Further control measures that may be reasonable to take could include:

- considering the nature of the employee's interaction with the public and whether alternative duties may be appropriate to reduce potential transmission risk
- encouraging workers to notify their employer if they are identified as a close contact of someone who is displaying symptoms of a communicable disease (including flu coronavirus or norovirus), to enable consideration of appropriate reasonable adjustments and mitigation measures such as physical distancing and wearing of PPE or face coverings
- reinforcing the importance of the person following advice for close contacts published in the 'Guidance for people with symptoms of a respiratory infection', including COVID-19
- identifying workers who were previously on the Shielding Patient List and seeking to avoid any close contact with a symptomatic case of a communicable disease working in close proximity to them
- considering whether others should be informed if a person has had close contact to someone with symptoms of any communicable disease

Summary

In summary, persons responsible for premises should continue to comply with health and safety legal requirements. In addition they should consider the public health measures set out in this advice and implement where reasonably practicable to do so. This will help minimise exposure to and spread of communicable diseases (including flu, coronavirus and norovirus) in the work place.