

FIS Methodologies for Working with COVID-19 Restrictions

Introduction

The focus of developing and implementing any method, procedure, or process in regard to health and safety is to preserve life and maintain the health of the people at work. Organisations are strongly advised to develop and implement measures that record methods, procedures and/or processes for working with the current COVID-19 restrictions.

Employers must recognise that a growing number of people will have experienced bereavement during this pandemic. It is likely that significant numbers will experience anxiety about the virus, its impact on daily life and wellbeing, and the risk of a return to work outside the home for themselves and their families. Employers must pay attention to their workers' mental health and wellbeing, in addition to physical safety.

The information and suggestions available for working with the restrictions imposed by the current pandemic are numerous, some good and useful, some not so good or useful. We at FIS have interrogated a number of sources in a bid to provide a single document of suggestions for COVID-19 health and safety planning. This is by no means definitive. The chosen media must reflect the individual organisation, the work situation, the individual tasks, and the environment. FIS has produced a [FIS Four Step Protocol](#) based on the principles of Start Safe, Site Safe, Task Safe and Home Safe.

There are a number of approaches that can be adopted. This paper considers two possible systems:

1. Method Statement(s)
2. A COVID-19 Exposure Plan

Please note the information listed in the 'plan' below can be used to populate a Method Statement or Statements.

Personal Protective Equipment

Putting people into Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Respiratory Protective Equipment (RPE) is the final step in the hierarchy of control measures, the type of PPE and RPE must be determined by the specific task, operation or product. In this pandemic demand and in some cases over use of PPE and RPE is creating shortages of certain types of equipment. FIS recommends checking, manufacturers recommendations, COSHH data sheets and HSE information to ensure the type of protective equipment:

- a. provides the level protection required
- b. is suitable for the wearer
- c. conforms to UK standards

More detailed information on [selecting PPE and RPE can be found here](#).

Method Statements

The following paragraphs, seven to 15 have been extracted from [Health and Safety Executive \(HSE\) information on Method Statements](#). FIS comments have been added in a bid to provide clarity:

The arrangements for carrying out demolition, dismantling or structural alteration must be recorded in writing before the work begins. This is usually achieved by means of a Method Statement that can be generated from a risk assessment.

Comment: An [FIS COVID-19 example Risk Assessment](#) is available.

While not required by law, Method Statements are also prepared for many other construction activities and are proven to be an effective and practical way to help plan, manage and monitor construction work.

Comment: Prepared Method Statements are generally specific to a task and may need amendment and additional information for the COVID-19 restrictions. A Method Statement system may not be applicable for office work.

They can take account of risks identified by the risk assessment and communicate the safe system of work to those carrying it out, especially for higher-risk complex or unusual work (e.g. steel and formwork erection, demolition or the use of hazardous substances). A Method Statement draws together the information compiled about the various hazards and the ways in which they are to be controlled for any job from the conclusions of the risk assessments.

Comment: Risk assessments must be completed using the hierarchy of control measures.

A Method Statement also takes account of a company's health and safety organisation and training procedures and may include arrangements to deal with serious or imminent danger.

Comment: The arrangements for working during this pandemic relate to all areas of the workplace and all activities. An 'overarching' single Method Statement, for operating in a COVID-19 environment covering the four steps of the FIS Protocol to Safe Systems of Work: Start safe, Site Safe, Task safe and Home safe, may be appropriate for some situations. This would allow the referencing of all existing Method Statements to the overarching COVID-19 Method Statement and organisational policy.

The Method Statement describes in a logical sequence exactly how a job is to be carried out in a way that secures health and safety and includes all the control measures.

This will allow the job to be properly planned with the appropriate health and safety resources needed for it. It can also provide information for other contractors working at the site about any effects the work will have on them and help the principal contractor develop the [Portable Document Format](#) for the project.

If a similar operation is repeated, the statement will be similar from job to job. However, if circumstances change markedly e.g. with demolition, the statement should be revised for each job.

Comment: See 8 above, consider the use of dynamic risk assessments, training will be required for all operatives.

The Method Statement is an effective way of providing information to employees about how they expect the work to be carried out and the precautions that should be taken. The most effective Method Statements often include diagrams to make it clear how work should be carried out. Checking that the working methods set out in the statement are actually put into practice on site can also be a useful monitoring tool.

Comment: FIS recommend the inclusion of site drawing, photographs and films.

When reviewing the risk assessments, information from monitoring previous jobs, accident records and investigations can help to decide if adequate precautions are being applied.

16. Work should only take place when there is an adequate number of people able to carry out the work safely. A COVID-19 risk assessment and resulting Method Statement should factor in the likelihood of continuing absences across

any business, and the availability of any safety-critical staff. Employers must also be mindful that workloads are manageable. As the rate of absence remains high because of sickness, self-isolation or other factors, output may need to be adjusted to safeguard employees' mental and physical health.

Comment: Daily assessment of the situation is recommended. This can be controlled by the appointment of a COVID-19 officers, managers, monitors or supervisors.

A COVID-19 Exposure Control Plan

A COVID-19 exposure control plan, which includes control measures, symptom checking, social distancing, hygiene and decontamination procedures, and training may be more appropriate than amending or adding to Method Statements or producing a single COVID-19 overarching Method Statement. An COVID-19 exposure control plan that includes the following suggested recommendations could be provided before operatives and/or staff return to the workplace.

A COVID-19 Exposure Plan may contain:

- **The site:** if the site is not yours check it to ensure it is safe, here is an [FIS Example site checklist](#)
- **Travel:** suggest methods of travel for employees, avoiding public transport were possible. Ensure there is sufficient parking for your employees.
- **Responsibility:** designate a site-specific COVID-19 officer. The duties could include daily site checks, social distancing conformity checks, toolbox talks, task briefings, provide direct supervision and control of tasks were social distancing is not possible by following established methods and going home briefings.
- **Recording:** a system of recording face to face working and exposure times should be implemented and maintained.
- **Workplace:** plan for office staff to have the ability to work from home. Mark workspace areas.
- **Training:** train operatives and staff with the most recent information on the COVID-19 hazard and control measures, including social distancing, minimising face to face interactions, handwashing facilities on site, how high-touch surfaces are disinfected, use of PPE and arrival at home decontamination.
- **Screening:** ask operatives and staff to self-identify symptoms of fever, coughing, shortness of breath, chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, and new

loss of taste or smell each day, before the shift, mid-shift, and at home.

- Screen all operatives and staff for fever at the beginning of shifts and if they become ill at work. Thermometers must be 'no touch' or 'no contact.'
 - Operatives and staff with COVID-19 and other people who have had close contact with them should be put on sick leave. The area where the sick person worked should be immediately disinfected.
- **Social distancing:** implement social distancing procedures and checks for conformity in accordance with [FIS Four Step Protocol](#) to develop safe systems of work: aligned to the Construction Leadership Councils [Site Operating Procedures](#), Work Planning to Avoid Close Working pages 5 and 6. consider including the following:
 - Minimise interactions when picking up or delivering equipment or materials. Organise the placement of materials and deliveries to minimise further movement. Putting people in PPE is a last resort [for more information click here](#)
 - Consider structuring the workforce into teams or 'work bubbles' consisting of people from the same household, geographical area, and/or teams of people who often work and socialise together, particularly those who have been tested negative. **N.B. As soon as one of a team tests positive it is advisable to isolate the whole team.**
 - Ensure those working in close proximity stay in the same small team.
 - **Decontamination:** Clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces on sites and in offices, such as shared tools, machines, vehicles and other equipment, handrails, doorknobs, and toilets frequently. Make disinfectants available to employees throughout the site and ensure supplies are frequently replenished. Increase the cleaning routines.
 - **Personal hygiene:** Provide soap and running water whenever possible on all sites for frequent handwashing. If it is not possible to provide running water provide alcohol-based hand sanitisers as a backup. Encourage operatives to leave their

workstations to wash their hands before and after going to the toilet, before eating, and after coughing, sneezing, or blowing their nose.

- **Respiratory protection:** If operatives and staff need to be near each other to perform tasks or when working in close proximity, such as confined space work, they should wear face masks as specified in the risk assessment for the task. Cloth face coverings are not respirators and do not replace physical distancing or respirators required for specific construction activities. The temptation to over protect is high and there is evidence that this is causing shortages of specific items, please see guidance at [HSE HSG 53 RPE](#)
- **Waste:** Provide sufficient waste bins for used cleaning materials and single use PPE and ensure all is disposed on in accordance with current legislation.

In response to questions regarding the COVID-19 outbreak, the following are steps employees should be taking now:

- Don't go to work if you are feeling sick.
- Don't go to work if you have a fever.
- Don't go to work if you have a cough or shortness of breath.
- Avoid contact with people you know are sick.
- Don't shake hands when greeting others.
- Avoid large gatherings or meetings of 10 people or more.
- Stay at least 2 metres away from others while travelling, on site, in the workplace and in gatherings, meetings, and training sessions.
- Cover your mouth and nose with tissues if you cough or sneeze or do so into your elbow.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Clean your hands often by washing them with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. When hand washing is not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser. Soap and water should be used if hands are visibly dirty.
- Clean your hands frequently, including before and after going to the toilet, before eating, and after coughing, sneezing, or blowing your nose.
- Bring food and drinks from home to the workplace and do not share.
- Drive to sites or parking areas by yourself, no passengers or carpooling unless people are from the same household.

- Disinfect interiors and door handles of machines or vehicles, and the handles of equipment and tools that are shared following your employer's COVID-19 exposure control plan.

Special guidance for older operatives and people with underlying health conditions:

- Older adults and those with underlying health conditions like heart disease, diabetes, and lung disease and those with compromised immune systems (such as lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, cancer therapy) are more at risk of becoming very sick from COVID-19.
- Operatives with members of their household who are deemed to be at higher risk, those who have received an NHS letter, should not work, or should be advised to find alternative accommodation.

More Information

21. For more information please visit FIS website at: [FIS health and safety](#) or contact the FIS on 01217 070077 or email info@thefis.org.

Further resources to support members in managing issues associated with COVID-19 are available through the [FIS COVID-19 Hub](#)

While every care has been taken to ensure the accuracy of the details presented in this document, we regret that FIS cannot be held responsible for any errors or omissions contained herein.