Safely returning to work after lockdown

Guidance for businesses returning to work following the lockdown

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Back to work guidance

The COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic has disrupted daily life as we know it, presenting major challenges to organisations in balancing the safety of staff and customers with the need to keep their businesses running.

The content of this document has been designed as a resource to assist in the return to work and to support you in planning and the protocols to prepare and safeguard your employees and business. It should be read in conjunction with the Government's latest advice as well as any sector specific advice for your industry.

Our team of risk managers at PIB Risk Management can help you to safely navigate a return to work. For more information please speak with your usual contact or email info@pibrm.com
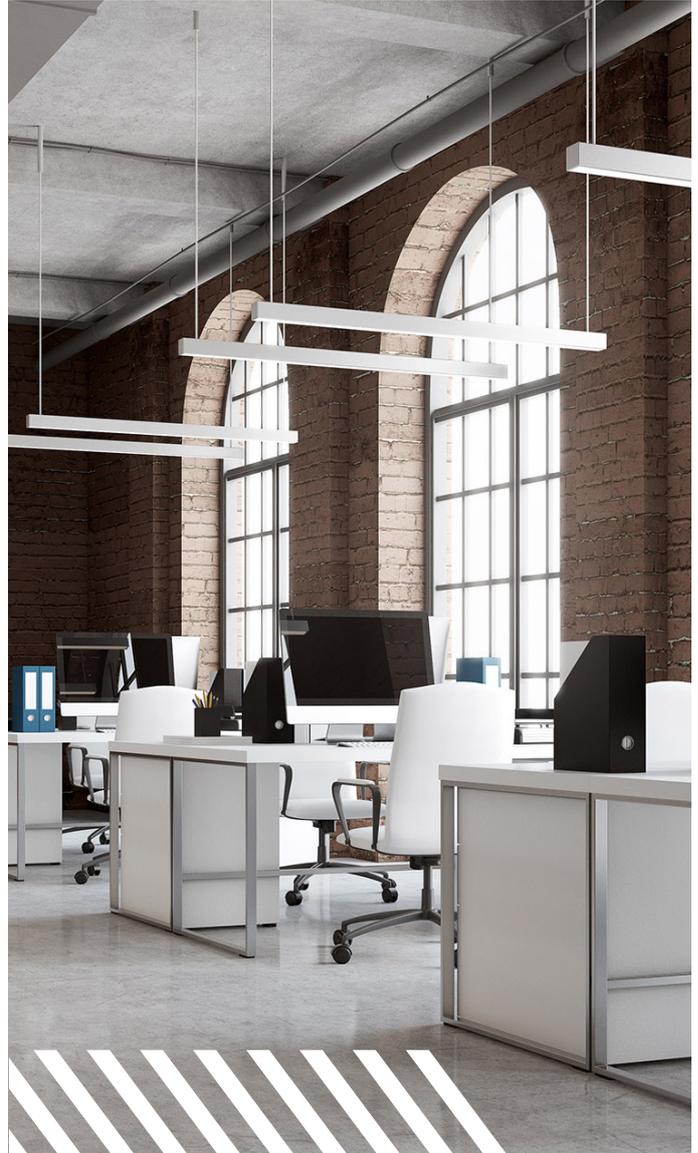
Getting back to work - 5 Steps

Plan & Communicate

Prepare Premises

Social Distancing

Control Access

Hygiene & Cleaning

1 / Plan and communicate

Naturally many of your colleagues will feel nervous about returning to work.

By ensuring you have thoroughly planned for their return and communicating these plans effectively with your team members you can help to reduce these anxieties and give them confidence they are returning to a safe place of work.

Some considerations to help you plan and communicate are listed below:

> Be clear about Government guidance for your sector

> Produce a risk assessment if you have more than 5 employees

> If you have more than 50 employees you should publish the risk assessment on your website

> Do not rush, continue to encourage remote working where possible

> Set employee expectations

> Establish regular dialogue with employees and encourage them to share views on reopening

> Create clear return to work policies and procedures

> Manage employee anxiety through clear engagement and planning

> Set clear expectations on the action required if a team member is unwell

> Understanding specific needs such as:
> > Vulnerable persons and pregnant women to remain working from home
> > Domestic circumstances
> > De-furloughing, e.g. who comes back and when? (People will need to know in advance so they can plan)

> Public Transport, e.g. is public transport available to colleagues who use this form of transport to come to work? Are there alternate ways to commute?

> Break down of functions to improve social distancing and business resilience

> Consider shift work

> Provide regular reassurance and clear guidance as the situation evolves

> Occupational Health Surveillance - The HSE have published further detailed guidance (see Further Reading).

2 / Prepare Premises

Once you have completed and communicated your return to work plan it is important that your premises are prepared for the return of your colleagues, customers and visitors.

Things to consider include:

> Deep clean of site with appropriate products

> Liaising with landlords, building owners or shared tenants to coordinate plans

> Increased cleaning routines or changes in cleaning rotas

> Complete necessary preparation of equipment, safety systems and inspections prior to opening

> Thorough examination of any plant and equipment

> Legionella checks following unoccupied period / tap running

> Setting up screens / barriers at desks / reception where possible

> Consider the layout of public areas and any staff areas behind the scenes

> Reinstate waste collections if suspended

> Will there be adequate first aid cover and fire wardens on site?

> Internal checks e.g. fire call point checks, first aid box checks etc. If the person who undertakes these is still on furlough who will complete this work in their absence?

> Ceasing all self-service activities such as provision of food that is pre-wrapped and remove vending machines

3 / Social Distancing

It is likely that social distancing will remain a key part of the Government's guidance for some time to come. All workplaces are different and social distancing practices will have to be adapted to suit your particular needs, some steps that most businesses can take include:

> Reducing workplace density through working from home or split shifts

> Altering office layouts where possible so that colleagues are spaced out and not facing one another

> Isolating individual buildings

> Dividing work areas into zones with personnel allocated to work within each zone. Movement between zones should be minimised and controlled

> Use of technology for video / virtual meetings

> Limiting the number of meetings, including length and proximity of gatherings between colleagues / others

> Shift handover arrangements should be altered to ensure the appropriate routines are followed

> Restricting / staggering the use of canteen facilities (bringing food / drinks to people)

> Removing tables / chairs from the canteen and restricting the number of staff per table

> Avoiding use of hot desks

> Encouraging use of external areas for breaks

4 / Access Control

Controlling access to your premises is key to ensuring the safety of your colleagues and visitors. Again this will vary from business to business and settings that see a regular flow of customers and visitors will need to consider how to encourage social distancing.

Additional considerations include:

> Providing alternatives to touch-based security devices such as keypads

> In environments open to the public where necessary implement a queue management system with correct distance markings

> Controlling numbers:
>> Booking appointments
>> Collection and delivery times
>> Numbers of persons allowed in the building

> Close non-essential areas that do not allow for safe distancing

> Clear signage to explain what is expected from visitors

> Consider layout of public areas, remove unnecessary furniture to enable social distancing

> Install screens where appropriate

> Reduce occupancy of lifts

> Change security codes if any staff have left

5 / Hygiene and Cleaning

Good hygiene and cleaning practices are the most important tool to prevent spread of COVID-19. Whilst messaging around these areas has been prominent throughout this pandemic it is still important to continue to reinforce good practice including:

> Putting up appropriate signage in your premises and communicate the recommendations to prevent infection spread e.g.
>> Correct hand washing procedures
>> Respiratory hygiene – using tissues or flexed elbow when coughing or sneezing
>> Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth

> Addition of wash and gel stations at strategic points around the site including entrance and exit as well as other key areas

> Supply disinfectants around work areas, particularly in shared spaces

> Remove any shared tools e.g. remote controls, touch screen devices, white boards

> Implement a clean and clear desk policy

> Create plan for enhanced cleaning where a colleague shows symptoms or tests positive for Covid-19

> Designate an isolation room to isolate any colleague who identifies symptoms whilst in workplace

> Review the on-going cleaning regimes on site

Further Reading

Government Coronavirus advice
https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus

Government back to work advice
https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-guidance-launched-to-help-get-brits-safely-back-to-work

Government sector specific advice
https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19

HSE website
www.hse.gov.uk/news/coronavirus.htm

First aid
www.hse.gov.uk/news/first-aid-certificate-coronavirus.htm

RIDDOR
www.hse.gov.uk/news/riddor-reporting-coronavirus.htm

Health surveillance
www.hse.gov.uk/news/health-surveillance-coronavirus.htm

Examination (work equipment)
www.hse.gov.uk/news/work-equipment-coronavirus.htm

HSE PPE
www.hse.gov.uk/news/face-mask-ppe-rpe-coronavirus.htm

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