

1. Home (<https://www.gov.uk/>)
2. COVID-19: guidance for employees, employers and businesses (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19>)

1. Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-business-energy-and-industrial-strategy>)
2. Public Health England (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england>)

Guidance

Guidance for employers and businesses on coronavirus (COVID-19)

Updated 7 April 2020

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This guidance will assist employers, businesses and their staff in staying open safely during coronavirus (COVID-19).

During this time of unprecedented disruption, the UK Government is not asking all businesses to shut – indeed it is important for business to carry on. Only some non-essential shops and public venues have been asked to close – see more detailed information on the businesses and venues that must close, and those that are exempt (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/further-businesses-and-premises-to-close>).

The government understands that employers and businesses may have concerns about how they can remain open for business safely, and so play their part in preventing the spread of the virus. All employees should be encouraged to work from home unless it is impossible for them to do so. Not everyone can work from home: certain jobs require people to travel to, from and for their work – for instance to operate machinery, work in construction or manufacturing, or to deliver front line services. For specific settings please refer to sector specific guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/social-distancing-in-the-workplace-during-coronavirus-covid-19-sector-guidance>).

Below is a summary of advice for employers and businesses in England to follow to protect their workforce and customers, whilst continuing to trade. It includes social distancing, hygiene, cleanliness, staff sickness advice and staying at home. For advice to businesses in other nations of the UK please see guidance set by the Northern Ireland Executive (<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-business-and-employers>), the Scottish Government (<https://findbusinesssupport.gov.scot/coronavirus-advice>) and the Welsh Government (<https://businesswales.gov.wales/coronavirus-advice>).

More advice on social distancing (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/full-guidance-on-staying-at-home-and-away-from-others/full-guidance-on-staying-at-home-and-away-from-others>) is available. Some people are extremely vulnerable to severe illness from coronavirus (COVID-19) and need to be shielded. See more advice on shielding (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>).

View general FAQs on the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do>), and what you can and cannot do.

This guidance may be updated in line with the changing situation.

What you need to know

- businesses and workplaces should make every possible effort to enable working from home as a first option. Where working from home is not possible, workplaces should make every effort to comply with the social distancing guidelines set out by the government
- members of staff who are vulnerable or extremely vulnerable, as well as individuals whom they live with, should be supported as they follow the recommendations set out in guidance on social distancing (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>) and shielding (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>) respectively

- where the social distancing guidelines cannot be followed in full in relation to a particular activity, businesses should consider whether that activity needs to continue for the business to operate, and, if so, take all the mitigating actions possible to reduce the risk of transmission between their staff. Potential mitigating actions are set out in these illustrative industry examples (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/social-distancing-in-the-workplace-during-coronavirus-covid-19-sector-guidance>)
- staff who are unwell with symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) should not travel to or attend the workplace.
- staff may be feeling anxious about coming to work and also about impacts on livelihood. Workplaces should ensure staff are fully briefed and appropriately supported at this time
- any member of staff who develops symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) (a new, continuous cough and/or a high temperature) should be sent home and stay at home for 7 days from onset of symptoms. If the member of staff lives in a household where someone else is unwell with symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) then they must stay at home in line with the stay at home guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>)
- employees will need your support to adhere to the recommendation to stay at home to reduce the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) to others
- employees should be reminded to wash their hands for 20 seconds more frequently and catch coughs and sneezes in tissues
- frequently clean and disinfect objects and surfaces that are touched regularly, using your standard cleaning products
- those who follow advice to stay at home will be eligible for statutory sick pay (SSP) from the first day of their absence from work
- employers should use their discretion concerning the need for medical evidence for certification for employees who are unwell. This will allow GPs to focus on their patients
- if evidence is required by an employer, those with symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) can get an isolation note from NHS 111 online (<https://111.nhs.uk/covid-19>), and those who live with someone that has symptoms can get a note from the NHS website (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/self-isolation-advice/>)

Symptoms

The most common symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) are a new, continuous cough or a high temperature.

For most people, coronavirus (COVID-19) will be a mild infection.

Good practice for employers

It's good practice for employers to:

- keep everyone updated on actions being taken to reduce risks of exposure to coronavirus (COVID-19) in the workplace

- ensure employees who are in a vulnerable group are strongly advised to follow social distancing guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people>)
- ensure employees who are in an extremely vulnerable group and should be shielded (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>) are supported to stay at home
- make sure everyone's contact numbers and emergency contact details are up to date
- make sure managers know how to spot symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) and are clear on any relevant processes, for example sickness reporting and sick pay, and procedures in case someone in the workplace is potentially infected and needs to take the appropriate action
- make sure there are places to wash hands for 20 seconds with soap and water, and encourage everyone to do so regularly
- provide hand sanitiser and tissues for staff, and encourage them to use them

Social distancing in the workplace - principles

Social distancing involves reducing day-to-day contact with other people as much as possible, in order to reduce the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19). Businesses and workplaces should encourage their employees to work at home, wherever possible.

If you cannot work from home then you can still travel to work. This is consistent with the Chief Medical Officer for England's advice.

The advice on social distancing measures applies to everyone and should be followed wherever possible. Workplaces need to avoid crowding and minimise opportunities for the virus to spread by maintaining a distance of at least 2 metres (3 steps) between individuals wherever possible. This advice applies both to inside the workplace, and to where staff may need to interact with customers. Staff should be reminded to wash their hands regularly using soap and water for 20 seconds and particularly after blowing their nose, sneezing or coughing. Where facilities to wash hands are not available, hand sanitiser should be used. Workers should cover any coughs or sneezes with a tissue, then dispose of the tissue in a bin and immediately wash their hands.

The practical implementation of this advice will depend on the local circumstances; see examples for various industries (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/social-distancing-in-the-workplace-during-coronavirus-covid-19-sector-guidance>).

A few general indicators will be relevant to the majority of business settings:

- make regular announcements to remind staff and/or customers to follow social distancing advice and wash their hands regularly
- encourage the use of digital and remote transfers of material where possible rather than paper format, such as using e-forms, emails and e-banking
- provide additional pop-up handwashing stations or facilities if possible, providing soap, water, hand sanitiser and tissues and encourage staff to use them
- where it is possible to remain 2 metres apart, use floor markings to mark the distance, particularly in the most crowded areas (for example, where queues form)

- where it is not possible to remain 2 metres apart, staff should work side by side, or facing away from each other, rather than face to face if possible
- where face-to-face contact is essential, this should be kept to 15 minutes or less wherever possible
- as much as possible, keep teams of workers together (cohorting), and keep teams as small as possible

Additionally, for customer-facing businesses:

- use signage to direct movement into lanes, if feasible, while maintaining a 2 metre distance
- regulate entry so that the premises do not become overcrowded
- use additional signage to ask customers not to enter the premises if they have symptoms
- if feasible, place plexiglass barriers at points of regular interaction as an additional element of protection for workers and customers (where customers might touch or lean against these, ensure they are cleaned and disinfected as often as is feasible in line with standard cleaning procedures)

See further information on social distancing and adults who are at increased risk of coronavirus (COVID-19) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults>).

Shift-working and staggering processes

Where it is not possible for work to be completed at home, businesses should consider shift working or the staggering of processes which would enable staff to continue to operate both effectively and where possible at a safe distance (more than 2 metres) from one another. Staggering on-premises hours to reduce public transport use during peak periods will provide benefit to employees, businesses and the wider public effort.

Practically, a business could consider:

- splitting staff into teams with alternate days working from home, or splitting across a day and night shift
- as far as possible, where staff are split into teams, fixing these splits (cohorting), so that where contact is unavoidable, this happens between the same individuals
- spreading out standard processes, so that only one team needs to be on the premises to complete a task at a given time
- where it is possible to remain 2 metres apart, using signage such as floor markings to facilitate compliance, particularly in the most crowded areas. This includes entry points to buildings, toilets and communal break areas where queues may form

Businesses working on shift patterns should:

- ensure that the business's social distancing measures are effectively communicated to all staff
- ensure frequent cleaning and disinfecting of objects and surfaces that are touched regularly, using your standard cleaning products and particularly at the end and beginning of shifts

Staff canteens and rest areas

Where possible, staff should be encouraged to bring their own food, and staff canteens and distributors should move to takeaway.

Where there are no practical alternatives, workplace canteens may remain open to provide food to staff with appropriate adjustments for social distancing. The following principles should be applied:

- canteen staff who are unwell should not be at work
- canteen staff should wash their hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before and after handling food
- staff should be reminded to wash their hands regularly using soap and water for 20 seconds and before and after eating. If possible, increase the number of hand washing stations available
- a distance of 2 metres should be maintained between users, wherever possible
- staff can continue to use rest areas if they apply the same social distancing measures
- notices promoting hand hygiene and social distancing should be placed visibly in these areas
- frequently clean and disinfect surfaces that are touched regularly, using your standard cleaning products
- consider extending and staggering meal times to avoid crowding

Staying at home if you, or someone in your household, has symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) on site

If anyone becomes unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature in the business or workplace they should be advised to follow the stay at home guidance

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance>) for households with possible coronavirus (COVID-19) infection. If these symptoms develop whilst at work they should be sent home, they should return home quickly and directly. If they have to use public transport, they should try to keep away from other people and catch coughs and sneezes in a tissue.

If a member of staff has helped someone who was taken unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature, they do not need to go home unless they develop symptoms themselves. They should wash their hands thoroughly for 20 seconds after any contact with someone who is unwell with symptoms consistent with coronavirus (COVID-19) infection.

It is not necessary to close the business or workplace or send any staff home, unless government policy changes. Keep monitoring the government response page (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>) for the latest details.

If you, or an employee, need clinical advice, they should go to NHS 111 online (<https://111.nhs.uk/covid-19>), or call 111 if they don't have internet access. In an emergency, call 999 if they are seriously ill or injured or their life is at risk. Do not visit the GP, pharmacy, urgent care centre or a hospital.

If the member of staff lives in a household where someone else is unwell with symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) then they must stay at home in line with the stay at home guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance>).

Sick pay

Those who follow advice to stay at home and who cannot work as a result will be eligible for statutory sick pay (SSP), even if they are not themselves sick.

Employers should use their discretion and respect the medical need to self-isolate in making decisions about sick pay.

Anyone not eligible to receive sick pay, including those earning less than an average of £118 per week, some of those working in the gig economy, or self-employed people, is able to claim Universal Credit (<https://www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk/coronavirus/>) and/or contributory Employment and Support Allowance.

For those on a low income and already claiming Universal Credit, it is designed to automatically adjust depending on people's earnings or other income. However, if someone needs money urgently they can apply for an advance through the journal in their Universal Credit account.

Certifying absence from work

By law, medical evidence is not required for the first 7 days of sickness. After 7 days, employers may use their discretion around the need for medical evidence if an employee is staying at home.

We strongly suggest that employers use their discretion around the need for medical evidence for a period of absence where an employee is advised to stay at home either as they are unwell themselves, or live with someone who is, in accordance with the public health advice issued by the government.

What to do if an employee needs time off work to look after someone

Employees are entitled to time off work to help someone who depends on them (a 'dependant') in an unexpected event or emergency. This would apply to situations related to coronavirus (COVID-19). For example:

- if they have children they need to look after or arrange childcare for because their school has closed
- to help their child or another dependant if they're sick, or need to go into isolation or hospital

There's no statutory right to pay for this time off, but some employers might offer pay depending on the contract or workplace policy.

ACAS have more information online (<https://www.acas.org.uk/coronavirus>) and can help with specific queries by phone.

Limiting spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) in business and workplaces

Businesses and employers can help reduce the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) by reminding everyone of the public health advice. See posters, leaflets and other materials (<https://campaignresources.phe.gov.uk/resources/campaigns/101-coronavirus-/resources>).

Employees and customers should be reminded to wash their hands for 20 seconds more frequently than normal.

Employers should frequently clean and disinfect objects and surfaces that are touched regularly, using your standard cleaning products.

See further advice on individual sectors (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/social-distancing-in-the-workplace-during-coronavirus-covid-19-sector-guidance>).

Use of face masks in the community

There is very little evidence of widespread benefit from the use of face masks outside of the clinical or care settings, where they play a very important role. To be effective, face masks must be worn correctly, changed frequently, removed properly, disposed of safely and used in combination with good universal hygiene behaviour.

Research shows that compliance with these recommended behaviours reduces over time when wearing face masks for prolonged periods, such as in the community. Therefore, PHE does not advise masks in public places and for those working in supermarkets, waste collection, schools and similar settings.

PHE recommends that employers should ensure that:

- spaces in the workplace are optimised to allow social distancing to occur, wherever possible
- signs are visible in the workplace reminding employees not to attend work if they have a fever or cough and to avoid touching their eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands
- employees are provided with hand sanitiser for frequent use and regular breaks to allow them to wash their hands for 20 seconds

The UK does not currently advise use of face masks outside of care settings, in line with PPE guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-infection-prevention-and-control/covid-19-personal-protective-equipment-ppe>).

PHE will continually review guidance in line with emerging evidence and World Health Organization (WHO) guidance, and update our guidance whenever new evidence suggests that we should do so.

Moving goods

The World Health Organization (WHO) advises that the likelihood of an infected person contaminating commercial goods is low. The risk of catching the virus that causes COVID-19 from a physical package is also very low.

Cleaning and waste disposal

The government has provided guidance on cleaning and waste (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings>) disposal to help businesses reduce the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19).

Handling post or packages

Staff should continue to follow existing risk assessments and safe systems of working; there are no additional precautions needed for handling post or packages.

Food safety

See the government guidance on food safety (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-food-businesses/guidance-for-food-businesses-on-coronavirus-covid-19>). This includes guidance on food hygiene, managing employee sickness and social distancing in the workplace, including for food processing plants, supermarkets and outdoor food markets.