

# HM Government announces 'COVID Secure' Guidance to businesses - Offices and Contact Centres

Correct as of 13th May 2020

As part of HM Government's COVID Recovery Strategy they are encouraging businesses to re-open where working from home is not possible. As part of this strategy businesses are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the 'COVID Secure' guidance, which has now been published, in order that they can resume their activities safely as the UK moves to the next stage of dealing with the pandemic.

Whilst this guidance has been set by the UK Government it states explicitly that this guidance should be considered alongside local public health and safety requirements and legislation in the devolved administrations. So businesses operating across the devolved nations will have to be aware of possible national variations to the guidance, although it is hoped that these will be minor differences.

The guidance will be updated periodically as the UK moves through the pandemic and scientific advice is updated. SGBs are encouraged to check regularly for updates to the guidance

In this blog we will be summarising the key considerations that SGBs with offices will need to consider from the COVID Secure guidance. This includes other indoor environments such as contact centres, operations rooms and similar workplaces

## Key Considerations

### Risk Assessments

The first Government recommendation is to identify potential risks and carry out a risk assessment. SGBs will be familiar with carrying out risk assessments generally as they have a legal responsibility to protect the health and safety of their employees. The requirement moving forward is to complete a specific risk assessment for COVID-19, this will mean SGBs have to consider applicable risks arising from the virus and potential steps SGBs can take to minimise those risks.

SGBs are being asked to share the results of your risk assessment with your workforce, and if possible, SGBs should consider publishing the results on your website. The Government has also stated that they would expect all SGBs with over 50 workers to do so. It is unclear whether or not this request to publish will be enforced in anyway but SGBs are encouraged to share their results.

Certain measures suggested that SGBs should consider in their risk assessments are:

- Increasing the frequency of handwashing and surface cleaning.
- SGBs should continue to make every reasonable effort to enable working from home as a first option. Where working from home is not possible, workplaces should make every reasonable effort to comply with the social distancing guidelines set out by the government (keeping people 2m apart wherever possible).
- Where the social distancing guidelines cannot be followed in full, in relation to a particular activity, SGBs should consider whether that activity needs to continue for the SGB to operate, and if so, take all the mitigating actions possible to reduce the risk of transmission between their staff.
- Increasing the frequency of hand washing and surface cleaning.
- Keeping the activity time involved as short as possible.
- Using screens or barriers to separate people from each other.
- Using back-to-back or side-to-side working (rather than face-to-face) whenever possible.
- Reducing the number of people each person has contact

with by using 'fixed teams or partnering' (so each person works with only a few others).

- Finally, if people must work face-to-face for a sustained period with more than a small group of fixed partners, then you will need to assess whether the activity can safely go ahead. No one is obliged to work in an unsafe work environment.

## Who should attend work?

The second element from the guidance surrounds those who should be at work. The guidance makes clear that those who can work from home should continue to do so for the time being. It gives examples of individuals who might not be able to work from home for example those who are involved in safe facility management.

The guidance then makes particular note of those individuals who are currently shielding because they are at higher risk from the virus. The guidance notes that these individuals should be helped to work from home, either in their current role or in an alternative role. It makes explicit mention of the Equality Act and considerations SGBs have with regards to expectant mothers and disabled individuals. SGBs will need to be especially mindful of these groups when re-opening to ensure that the necessary adjustments are made for those individuals.

If SGBs are concerned in relation to their obligations under the Equality Act and how these relate to a resuming their operations they are encouraged to take early advice.

The current situation is that Scotland remains locked-down more than in England and whilst some relaxations have been made for work in England (people returning to work where they cannot work from home and their place of work has not been closed) the situation remains tighter in Scotland, with guidance remaining that people should not open their offices, businesses, etc, unless they are involved in critical supply.

## Social Distancing at Work

The Government has stressed that where employees are required back to work that where possible social distancing should be maintained at all times whilst people are at work. This should include measures to manage peoples entrance and exit from the workplace, movement around

the workplace, at their workstation, during meetings and in break rooms. A number of examples of how this could be achieved are offered in the guidance. It is explained though that in event of an emergency such as a fire evacuation then social distancing can be relaxed in order to achieve the safe exit from the building in such an event. Practical measures in the guidance to assist with social distancing include:

- Staggering arrival and departure times at work to reduce crowding into and out of the workplace, taking account of the impact on those with protected characteristics.
- Providing additional parking or facilities such as bike-racks to help people walk, run, or cycle to work where possible.
- Reducing congestion, for example, by having more entry points to the workplace.
- Providing more storage for workers for clothes and bags.
- Using markings and introducing one-way flow at entry and exit points.
- Providing handwashing facilities, or hand sanitiser where not possible, at entry/exit points and not using touch-based security devices such as keypads.
- Defining process alternatives for entry/exit points where appropriate, for example, deactivating turnstiles requiring pass checks in favour of showing a pass to security personnel at a distance.
- Reducing movement by discouraging non-essential trips within buildings and sites, for example, restricting access to some areas, encouraging use of radios or telephones, where permitted, and cleaning them between use.
- Restricting access between different areas of a building or site.
- Review layouts and processes to allow people to work further apart from each other.
- Using floor tape or paint to mark areas to help workers keep to a 2m distance.
- Only where it is not possible to move workstations

further apart, arranging people to work side by side or facing a way from each other rather than face-to-face.

- Only where it is not possible to move workstations further apart, using screens to separate people from each other.
- Managing occupancy levels to enable social distancing.

## Managing customers, contractors and visitors

It is accepted that business will have other individuals visiting their premises from time to time during the course of normal business but SGBs should seek to minimise the number of unnecessary visits to offices. If individuals from outside do need to attend then they should be notified in advance of the relevant safety measures and what they need to do when entering your workplace.

## Cleaning and Hygiene

The Government has stressed the importance of a clean workplace and good hygiene amongst staff in order that the virus doesn't linger on surfaces. They have advised that offices should be cleaned thoroughly prior to re-opening and that they should be cleaned regularly when employees return. In addition additional facilities should be provided to enable employees to wash their hands regularly whilst at work.

## PPE and Face Coverings

In this guidance the Government has downplayed the use of PPE within the office setting stressing that social distancing is a much more effective method than wearing PPE. However if staff want to wear a face covering whilst at work they can do so but this does not mean they don't have to follow other guidance. Staff should be aware of the limited benefits of face coverings and the importance of following other measures.

## Workforce Management

Aside from physical measures that may be taken SGBs are encouraged to manage their employees effectively in order to manage a safe return to work. This will include effective communication prior to re-opening on the measures taken and behaviours expected as well as regular communication if changes are made.

Also SGBs encouraged to look at shift patterns and working groups to minimise the amount of individuals employees have contact with. Creating distinct groups and reducing the number of contacts is seen as an effective way to manage risks.

SGBs should also seek to minimise and avoid unnecessary work travel and if travel is required keep people safe when they do need to travel between locations.

## Inbound and Outbound Goods

The final piece of guidance relates to goods entering and leaving the building. Social distancing should be maintained and a set drop off point is recommended to avoid taking goods directly from couriers and to avoid surface transmission when goods enter and leave the site the use of gloves and cleaning is encouraged.

## Get in touch

SGBs can access the **sportscotland** legal expert resource helpline by email at [sportscotlandinfo@harpermacleod.co.uk](mailto:sportscotlandinfo@harpermacleod.co.uk) or by calling **0141 227 9333**.