Briefing Note

CECA Member Briefing:

Covid-19: Back To Work Guidance

Introduction

The UK Government has published a number of guidance documents to help businesses and employees in England get back to work as the Covid-19 lockdown is eased in the coming weeks.

Businesses are continued to encourage employees to work from home if this is at all possible.

For the physical delivery of infrastructure in England, work should continue according to safe operating procedures, keeping as many people as possible 2 metres apart from those they do not live with. The UK Government is clear that workers must not be forced into unsafe workplaces, and that if workers require PPE to work safely, this must be provided by employers free of charge. The Construction Leadership Council's Site Operating Procedures are available to download here. The UK Government publication *Working safely during COVID-19 in construction and other outdoor work: Guidance for employers, employees and the self-employed* is available to download here.

The following guidance relates to businesses in England only. Companies operating in Scotland and Wales should apply this guidance alongside local public health and safety requirements and legislation in Scotland and Wales. This guidance is also likely to be updated over time, and CECA will keep members informed of any changes made to it.

Risk Assessments

Everyone needs to assess and manage the risks of Covid-19. As an employer, you have a legal responsibility to protect workers and others from risk to their health and safety. This means you need to think about the risks they face and do everything practicable to minimise them, recognising you cannot completely eliminate the risk of Covid-19.

You must make sure that the risk assessment for your business addresses the risks of COVID-19, using this guidance to inform your decisions and control measures. If you have fewer than 5 workers, or are self-employed, you don't have to write anything down as part of your risk assessment. Your risk assessment will help you decide whether you have done everything you need to. There are interactive tools available to support you from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

Employers have a duty to consult their employees on health and safety. The people doing the work are often the best people to understand the risks in the workplace and will have a view on how to work safely. Employers must consult with the health and safety representative selected by a recognised trade union or, if there isn't one, a representative chosen by workers. As an employer, you cannot decide who the representative will be.

In the context of COVID-19 reducing workplace risk to the lowest reasonably practicable level means working through these steps in order:

1. In every workplace, increasing the frequency of handwashing and surface cleaning.

2. Businesses and workplaces should 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).

3. 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.

Further mitigating actions include:

• 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.

In your assessment you should have particular regard to whether the people doing the work are especially vulnerable to Covid-19.

Employers should share the results of their risk assessments with their workforce. If possible, you should consider publishing the results on your website. The UK Government has said that it 'expects' all businesses with over 50 workers to do so.

The UK Government has provided a notice that should be displayed in workplaces once risk assessments have been completed, which can be downloaded here. In addition, CECA has produced a safe-working poster which can be downloaded here and in Welsh here.

Who Should Go To Work

The UK Government's objective is that everyone should work from home, unless they cannot work from home.

Clinically extremely vulnerable individuals have been strongly advised not to work outside the home. Clinically vulnerable individuals who are at higher risk of severe illness (for example, people with some pre-existing conditions have been asked to take extra care in observing social distancing and should be helped to work from home, either in their current role, or in an alternative role.

Considering who should work from home the following considerations will usually be needed:

1. Consider who is needed on site, for example, support staff should work from home if at all possible.
2. Planning for the minimum number of people needed to be on site to operate safely and effectively, for example, workers deemed necessary to carry out physical works, supervise work, or conduct work in order to operate safely.
3. Monitoring the wellbeing of people who are working from home and helping them stay connected to those operating in an outdoor environment, especially if the majority of their colleagues are on-site.
4. Keeping in touch with off-site workers on their working arrangements including their welfare, mental and physical health and personal security.
5. Providing equipment for people to work from home safely and effectively, for example, remote access to work systems.

Managing Contacts

In order to minimise the number of unnecessary visits to the worksite, the following steps should be taken:

1. Where site visits are required, site guidance on social distancing and hygiene should be explained to visitors on or before arrival.
2. Encouraging visits via remote connection/working where this is an option.
3. Limiting the number of visitors at any one time.
4. Determine if schedules for essential services and contractor visits can be revised to reduce interaction and overlap between people.
5. Maintaining a record of all visitors, if this is practical.

Signage

The Government has advised businesses to ensure public notices are visible and help inform workers, customers, visitors, contractors and the public to maintain social distancing whilst near the workplace.

There is a high likelihood in some areas that working outdoors will draw the attention of the public. Visible signage may be used to inform the public of the type of work that is being performed. Steps that will usually be needed include:

1. Providing signage to inform the public as to the course of business.

2. Providing signage at entrances to the worksite to remind the public and workers to maintain social distancing.

3. Providing signage on rights of way that cross your workplace to remind the public to maintain social distancing

4. Establishing host responsibilities relating to COVID-19, providing any necessary training for people who act as hosts for visitors.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

PPE protects the user against health or safety risks at work. It can include items such as safety helmets, gloves, eye protection, high-visibility clothing, safety footwear and safety harnesses. It also includes respiratory protective equipment, such as face masks.

Where you are already using PPE in your work activity to protect against non-COVID-19 risks, you should continue to do so.

When managing the risk of Covid-19, additional PPE beyond what you usually wear is not beneficial. This is because Covid-19 is a different type of risk to the risks you normally face in a workplace, and needs to be managed through social distancing, hygiene and fixed teams or partnering, not through the use of PPE.

The exception is clinical settings, like a hospital, or a small handful of other roles for which Public Health England advises use of PPE, for example, first responders and immigration enforcement officers. If you are in one of these groups you should refer to the advice at:

- Covid-19: personal protective equipment (PPE) plan - click here.

- Covid-19: cleaning in non-healthcare settings - click here.

Workplaces should not encourage the precautionary use of extra PPE to protect against Covid-19 outside clinical settings or when responding to a suspected or confirmed case of Covid-19.

Unless you are in a situation where the risk of Covid-19 transmission is very high, your risk assessment should reflect the fact that the role of PPE in providing additional protection is extremely limited. However, if your risk assessment does show that PPE is required, then you must provide this PPE free of charge to workers who need it. Any PPE provided must fit properly.

If members have access to spare PPE that is not needed for their sites to operate safely, they are encouraged to donate it to the NHS or care sector. More detail on how to do so can be found here.

Face coverings

There are some circumstances when wearing a face covering may be marginally beneficial as a precautionary measure. The evidence suggests that wearing a face covering does not protect you, but it may protect others if you are infected but have not developed symptoms.

A face covering can be very simple and may be worn in enclosed spaces where social distancing isn't possible. It just needs to cover your mouth and nose. It is not the same as a face mask, such as the surgical masks or respirators used by health and care workers. Similarly, face coverings are not the same as the PPE used to manage risks like dust and spray in an industrial context. Supplies of PPE, including face masks, must continue to be reserved for those who need them to protect against risks in their workplace, such as health and care workers, and those in industrial settings like those exposed to dust hazards.

It is important to know that the evidence of the benefit of using a face covering to protect others is weak and the effect is likely to be small, therefore face coverings are not a replacement for the other ways of managing risk, including minimising time spent in contact, using fixed teams and partnering for close-up work, and increasing hand and surface washing.

These other measures remain the best ways of managing risk in the workplace and government would therefore not expect to see employers relying on face coverings as risk management for the purpose of their health and safety assessments.

Wearing a face covering is optional and is not required by law, including in the workplace. If you choose to wear one, it is important to use face coverings properly and wash your hands before putting them on and taking them off.

Employers should support their workers in using face coverings safely if they choose to wear one. This means telling workers:

- wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser before putting a face covering on, and after removing it

- when wearing a face covering, avoid touching your face or face covering, as you could contaminate them with germs from your hands

- change your face covering if it becomes damp or if you've touched it

- continue to wash your hands regularly

- change and wash your face covering daily

- if the material is washable, wash in line with manufacturer's instructions. If it's not washable, dispose of it carefully in your usual waste

- practise social distancing wherever possible.

You can make face-coverings at home and can find guidance on how to do this and use them safely here.

Safer Travel Guidance For Passengers

The UK Government has also published safer travel guidance for passengers. It provides guidance for walking, cycling, using private vehicles (for example cars and vans), and travelling by taxis and public transport (for example trains, buses, coaches and ferries).

Members of the public are advised to avoid using public transport where possible. Instead people are advised try to walk, cycle, or drive. If you do travel, thinking carefully about the times, routes and ways you travel will mean we will all have more space to stay safe.

No form of travel should be attempted if:

- an individual is experiencing any coronavirus symptoms

- an individual is self-isolating as a result of coronavirus symptoms or sharing a household with somebody with symptoms

- an individual is clinically extremely vulnerable

The UK Government has produced a safer travel guidance for passengers information sheet, which is available to download here.

In addition, the UK Government has published guidance for people who work in or from vehicles, including couriers, mobile workers, lorry drivers, on-site transit and work vehicles, field forces and similar, which is available to download here.

For more information, please contact CECA Chief Executive Alasdair Reisner on 07977 151912 or e-mail alasdairreisner@ceca.co.uk

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