COMMUNITY LINKS BROMLEY

Factsheet: Going back to your workplace safely during the Covid 19 restrictions

In July "Lockdown" restrictions began to ease across England and some services reopened. But this is far from a return to normal conditions. As we enter mid-September the infection rate has unfortunately begun to rise in such a manner that that Government has reintroduced some restrictions. Once again staff that can function effectively away from the office are encouraged to work from home if possible. If attendance at the normal place of work is essential for the role then they should continue to do so in a safe environment.

Whist some may be able to return or continue to attend the normal workplace, this needs to be done in a controlled manner which ensures, as far as possible, the safety of employers, employees, volunteers and service users.

So how can you get your workplace ready to come back to?

What do you need to consider to keep your staff and volunteers as safe as possible?

If your organisation owns, leases or rents premises that it will be going back to work in, this factsheet outlines some of the key actions you need to take in order to get back to work safely.

There are many resources out there to help with this, so rather than reinvent the wheel, they are included as a part of this factsheet.

This factsheet is for all organisations and may cover areas that do not apply to you. If you would like further advice after reading this, please do contact us fdo@communitylinksbromley.org.uk

Looking after your staff/volunteers

We are all keen to get back to delivering services and seeing our staff and/or volunteers again. But we will need to think carefully about what services can start up again and how, as well as how staff and/or volunteers can safely return to the office.

It goes without saying, of course, that if any member of staff or volunteer feels unwell, then they should not come to work, but self-isolate and seek a test. Anyone with [symptoms](#) can get a coronavirus test, whatever their age.

Employers can refer essential workers for testing if they are self-isolating because either they or member(s) of their household have coronavirus symptoms. Included in the long list of essential workers are:

- religious staff

- charities and workers delivering critical frontline services, including volunteers

- unpaid carers

Anyone that has been in close contact with them should also self-isolate. On 30 July, the self-isolation period was extended to 10 days for those in the community who have COVID-19 symptoms or a positive test result. In addition, those staff, volunteers or service users who have been abroad will need to self-isolate in the place they are staying for the first 14 days after they arrive, unless they are travelling from certain countries or territories regarded as safe. This safe list can change at short notice.

You also need to be prepared for a local lockdown, or a roll back on certain activities if there is a spike in new cases. So, prepare contingency plans that can be implemented quickly for working from home where possible until the temporary restrictions have been lifted.

Re-opening your organisation

Undertaking a risk assessment will be an important first step to making this decision. There is detailed information on what to consider below but you may also find useful the [Charity Checklist](#) prepared by the Cranfield Trust. You can also find useful resources for managing and assessing risk on the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) website. The HSE has a suite of Covid-19 related advice and guidance.

1. Do you need to go back into the office/building?

Whist "lockdown" was immediate and easy to understand, the practical impact of the gradual easing of the restrictions has been more difficult to grasp, especially as we see a new rise in infections.

As of 1 August, employers in England have more freedom to decide whether staff should return to their place of work. The government changed its guidance about asking people to work from home where they can.

The Government gave employers more discretion to make decisions about how their staff can work safely. That meant continuing to work from home or returning to the workplace, Mr Johnson said. Employers should talk to their workers about what steps to take and only bring them back to their place of work if it is safe to do so.

But on 22 September the Government amended its position. Individuals who cannot work from home should go to a "safe Covid secure" workplace, but that if they can work from home they should do so.

But it's not all that simple. For example, on 15th August beauty treatment salons and bowling alleys were able to legally reopen if they observe safe working practices. Other settings such as discos and sports stadiums remain closed for the time being. Other hospitality venues will be required to close at 10pm as of 24th September.

If there is a gradual return to work, it is essential to consider how this can be achieved in a safe manner. This can be delivered in several ways including a voluntary return first for those most keen and then staggered start dates for others, rota systems for certain days etc. Even if you specify a start-back date, you will need to be flexible.

Employers must be especially careful and take extra steps for anyone in their workforce who is in a vulnerable group. Anyone who's been shielding should talk to their employer as soon as possible about plans to help them return. If they can continue to work from home, the employer should support this.

2. How will you safely deliver services?

Of course, face-to-face is often the preferred way to run our services and many of us have missed this interaction over the past months. However, not all the services you deliver must be done this way, could you continue to deliver some online or by phone?

For the services that need to be physically there, is it safe for your staff/volunteers and your beneficiaries? What measures can you put in place to keep everyone safe? For example, you could ask everyone to wear face masks/coverings when in the building, sit two metres apart, keep windows open, provide hand sanitiser and antiseptic wipes for equipment and desks. Some activities could take place in open spaces such as local parks where the infection risk is far lower, weather permitting.

3. How will staff/volunteers safely work in the space?

The work environment will need to be as safe as possible for people to return to. Your office may need reconfiguring. You may not be able to fit all staff in at once. Team meetings may still have to take place online. Perhaps you will want to ask staff to bring in their own cups, cutlery, food and refreshments and wear masks. Think about how equipment and the building is used and do a risk assessment with mitigations:

- How will you use shared equipment such as photocopiers, printers and other stationary items?
- Do you need to move back to fixed desks rather than hot desking?
- How will toilets be safely used – are there enough?

- Consider other communal areas such as kitchens and meeting rooms
- Consider limiting staff who can answer certain phones if rerouting is not possible
- Will you need to limit lift use to one person?
- If any of your staff/volunteers are vulnerable or live with someone who is, are there arrangements that can be made so that they continue to work from home?
- Have you considered how staff/volunteers travel to work?

The opening up of the economy following the COVID-19 outbreak is being supported by NHS Test and Trace. You should assist this service by keeping a temporary record of your customers, visitors and staff for 21 days, in a way that is manageable for your organisation, and assist NHS Test and Trace with requests for that data if needed. This could help contain clusters or outbreaks. More information on who this impacts on and how to record the information can be found here.

Your staff/volunteers may be local and can walk or cycle to work. However, others may live further away and rely on tubes, trains or buses to get into work. These journeys are likely to take much longer as passenger numbers on transport are vastly reduced, making strict work hours more difficult. Flexi-hours and only travelling in on the days they absolutely must. These journeys also increase risk. It is up to individuals to ensure they carry hand sanitiser, wear a mask and wash their hands, on arrival. But do they need to be making this journey? Does it need to be every day? Could it be off peak?

Health & Safety

'Employers have a 'duty of care' for staff, customers and anyone else who visits the workplace. This means they must do all they reasonably can to support their health, safety and wellbeing.

To make the workplace safe, employers must:

- have completed a 'risk assessment' and taken reasonable steps to prevent harm in the workplace. The risk assessment should be carried out with input from staff members.
- follow the government guidelines on safer working as set out on GOV.UK

To get advice on working safely during coronavirus from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) you can:

- find information on risk assessments on the HSE website
- use HSE's online enquiry form
- call 0300 790 6787, Monday to Friday 8:30am to 10pm'

If you own the building

Building owners will have to ensure that they are meeting all their statutory obligations. Therefore, before anyone comes back to the building, owners/property

managers/landlords should review fire risk assessments, carry out sprinkler testing, emergency light testing, service their fire alarm panels, intruder alert panels etc.

It may be a good time to give the building a spruce up, for example a deep clean, a fresh paint and doing any small maintenance jobs, especially to ensure there is running hot water and windows can be opened.

Think about how your building is used and who by. You may need to put up screens at reception areas, provide hand sanitiser by doorways, kitchen spaces and toilets.

Do you need to provide cleaning materials, gloves, soap etc?

You will also need to read the government guidance and ensure clear signage is visible throughout the building showing how people can enter and leave, keeping two metres apart, how lifts can be used and toilet and kitchen areas. This may mean introducing a one-way system around areas and also have separate entry and exit points.

What to ask of a landlord

It is worth understanding how the building you are based in may affect how your organisation can

work and ensure staff/volunteers are informed and ready.

• Has and is the building being cleaned on a regular basis?

• Has the water system been flushed through?

• What rules are they putting in place i.e. do you have to wear masks? Will you need to queue to gain access to the building, and so on.

• What measures are they putting in place such as ensuring there is hot water, soap, hand sanitiser?

Charity Shops

Charity Shops should follow the guidance on re-opening businesses and read the Charity Retail Associations 'Charity Shop Reopening Pack'.

Donations will need to be sorted through and advice is to put all new donations – from clothing to books, china and glass – into quarantine for a minimum of 72 hours to reduce the risk of contamination. In order to take donations, donors should be directed to "donation'" points, such as empty shops or warehouses, rather than just leaving goods in doorways and outside shops.

The shop itself will also need to be prepared with two metre spacings, perhaps a one-way system for walking around it. For shoppers, face coverings are now mandatory unless exempted. All changing rooms should be closed. Many shops are

moving to card only and your staff/volunteers should wear gloves when handling donations and cash (but wearing gloves is no substitute for regular hand washing and the cleaning of work surfaces). Many shops have erected plastic screens at the till counter to protect staff and customers and some staff are wearing masks or face visors.

Community Links Bromley Resources

All of our Covid-19 specific resources can be found <u>here</u>

Other Helpful Resources

- Acas 'Coronavirus (COVID-19): advice for employers and employees' https://www.acas.org.uk/coronavirus
- BHIB Charities Insurance 'Charity Reopening Checklist' https://www.bhibcharities.co.uk/advice/reopening-charities-after-covid-19-risk-assessments-for-returning-to-work-and-reopening-buildings/
- Charity Retail Association 'Charity Shop Reopening Pack' https://www.charityretail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/CRA-charity-shop-reopening-pack-V6-July-21-2020.pdf
- Cranfield Trust 'A Practical Guide to Re-Opening after Covid Closedown' https://hubble-live-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/cranfield-trust/redactor2_assets/files/793/Re-Entry_Checklists_CranfieldTrust_June2020.pdf
- Ethical Property Foundation 'Property Advice for Voluntary Organisations going back to work during the Covid-19 Pandemic'https://propertyhelp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/COVID-Back-to-Buildings.pdf
- Food Standards Agency 'Reopening checklist for food businesses during COVID-19' https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/reopening-checklist-for-food-businesses-during-covid-19
- Gov.UK 'COVID-19: Guidance for the safe use of multi-purpose community facilities' https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-multi-purpose-community-facilities
- GOV.UK 'Managing school premises during the coronavirus outbreak' https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/managing-school-premises-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/managing-school-premises-which-are-partially-open-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak
- GOV.UK 'Working safely during coronavirus (COVID-19)' https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19
- GOV.UK 'Coronavirus (COVID-19): safer travel guidance for passengers' https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-travel-guidance-for-passengers
- Gov.UK 'Reopen your business safely during coronavirus (COVID-19)' https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-business-reopening
- Gov.UK 'Working safely during coronavirus (COVID-19) - performing arts'

- https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/performing-arts
- Health & safety Executive 'Working safely during the coronavirus outbreak' https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/working-safely/index.htm
- Perkins & Will 'Road Map for Return 'https://perkinswill.com/road-map-for-return-uk/
- Bromley Council 'Advice to businesses restarting work' https://www.bromley.gov.uk/info/200013/business_support_and_advice/1415/advice_and_guidance_to_help_businesses_through_covid-19
- TFL 'Plan to help London travel safely and sustainably' https://tfl.gov.uk/info-for/media/press-releases/2020/may/tfl-announces-plan-to-help-london-travel-safely-and-sustainably
- The Church of England 'Coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance for churches' https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches
- London Sport ' Return to Sport and Physical Activity Guidance' https://londonsport.org/covid-19/return-to-sport-and-physical-activity-guidance/

Support

If you would like any support with the issues highlighted by this factsheet, please contact us at fdo@communitylinksbromley.org.uk

With acknowledgement to Community Southwark for sharing their original version of the guide.