



Staff Returning From Furlough - Risk Assessment and Reassurance Guide

Staff returning from furlough – Risk Assessments and Reassurance Guide

Introduction

Earlier this week, Boris Johnson set out his plan for restarting the economy and this led to confusion in the public wondering if they should go to work on Monday morning, causing groups of people to congregate at bus stops and railway stations. Since then, further guidance has enabled us to sift through what employers now need to do to play their part in getting their businesses back up and running and also safeguarding the health and safety of their staff.

Public Health England and the Health and Safety Executive have now published practical guidelines to help you do this, starting with undertaking (and publishing if you have more than 50 staff) a COVID-19 risk assessment.

The guidance covers eight workplace settings permitted to be open, including construction sites, factories and takeaways, and includes downloadable notices for employers to display to demonstrate they are following official guidance. The steps described aim to enable employers to identify specific risks brought by the Covid19 at work and to put measures in place to mitigate these. We sent a link to these documents to clients on Monday : <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

The guidance applies to businesses permitted to open under current government rules and also includes guidance for shops which the government said may be in a position to begin a phased reopening from 1 June.

Specific guidance for the eight workplace settings are as follows:

- **Construction and other outdoor work**
- **Factories, plants and warehouses**
- **Homes** - Guidance for people working in, visiting or delivering to home environments.
- **Labs and research facilities**
- **Offices and contact centres**
- **Restaurants offering takeaway or delivery**
- **Shops and branches**

- **Vehicles** - 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.

Guidance for other sectors that are currently closed will be developed and published ahead of those establishments opening to give those businesses time to plan.

There are five main principles to remember:

1. Work from home, if possible

Employers should take all reasonable steps to enable people to work from home. But for those employees who cannot and whose workplace has not been told to close, the government says its message is clear: staff "should go to work". Employers should communicate with employees about when their workplace will open and prepare them for any changes that will need to be made to the workplace and/or the way they carry out their job. We have a homeworking pack available on our portal for clients – for employers not on a retained contract with us, please email info@hrelite.co.uk for further support.

2. Consult with employees on COVID-19 risk assessments

Once you have completed your risk assessment, you should consult with staff (and trade unions if you have them) to work through the practical aspects of the recommendations made. Including your staff in this ensures that they understand the reasoning for the measures that are being introduced and also take responsibility for ensuring their own health and safety. Asking for their input may also identify any gaps in understanding and potentially highlight other measures that can be taken. Employers are being encouraged to publish their risk assessments – and they are 'expected' to do that if a business employs more than 50 people. We have a template risk assessment already shared with our clients – but available to buy - email info@hrelite.co.uk.

3. Maintain two metres' social distancing 'where possible'

Employers should redesign workspaces to maintain two-metre distances between people by staggering start times, creating one-way systems, opening more entrances and exits, staggering breaks and start/finish times or changing seating layouts.

4. Manage transmission risk

This is commonly the biggest area for attention for employers. Where people cannot be two metres apart, employers should take measures to separate them as far as possible. Depending on the work environment, this could mean erecting barriers and screens in shared spaces, creating shift patterns or fixed teams to minimise interpersonal contact, ensuring workers face away from one another and do not share equipment.

The risk assessment will need to identify the specific activities where social distancing is not possible; this might include vehicle sharing, construction and mechanical work that cannot be done independently. In this case, consider if there are alternative ways to work, or whether the activity is essential (some things just might not be possible). If the task has to be carried out then additional PPE may be recommended – face masks, goggles, gloves etc – but these should not be seen as an alternative to social distancing and should only be used for the time that they are required.

Welfare (kitchen and bathroom) facilities are an essential consideration when looking at managing transmission, and adequate supplies of hand washing facilities, with reminders to regularly wash hands for 20 seconds in place.

Travel – where employees cannot travel for work purposes alone then they should only share a vehicle with the same individual, wash/sanitise hands when entering and exiting the vehicle, open windows to ensure good ventilation, face away from each other and avoid touching face/skin. Regular cleaning with standard cleaning products should be used on commonly touched areas of the vehicle.

5. Reinforcing cleaning processes

Workplaces (and vehicles) should be cleaned more frequently using gloves and standard cleaning products, paying close attention to high-contact objects like door handles, keyboards, lift buttons etc. Employers should provide handwashing facilities or hand sanitisers at entry and exit points.

‘What if’ ...

- **staff refuse to come back when required?** Explain what you’ve done, share the risk assessment, ask for their input. They can only refuse to work if there has been an obvious disregard for what the government wants employers to implement, for example social distancing. If they are not unwell or have received a shielding letter, they should be at work. Remember that if employees remain unhappy with the social distancing at work, they can report it to their local authority or the Health and Safety Executive who can force an employer to take further action.
- **staff received a letter to tell them to shield for 12 weeks?** They cannot come back just yet – but they might be able to work from home
- **staff believe they at risk (but didn’t get a letter)?** They can come back, as long as you enforce social distancing measures. In fact, they *should* come back.
- **staff are not happy with the post-lockdown changes?** Talk to them, explain the changes, work through your risk assessment with them