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## Risk Insight: Planning for a return to the workplace



The COVID-19 outbreak resulted in restrictions on business activities and the closure of many workplaces. This Risk Insight has been developed to provide an overview of the steps that organisations can take to safely resume work activities and manage the risks following a suspension of workplace operations.

### Important Notice

Whilst reopening is taking place, please ensure that Government guidelines and restrictions continue to be observed.

Safety is the number one priority when restoring power and utilities to your building. Please contact qualified engineers such as approved electricians, heating engineers or plumbers if you require assistance.

Please note that this is intended to provide generic guidance only, to help you identify what practical steps may need to be taken to re-open your building safely. Please continue to refer to all government, regulatory and legislative guidance to ensure your organisation's continued compliance with their regulatory obligations with regards to building safety.

## **Introduction**

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the government implemented a range of measures to restrict transmission of the virus. These measures included the closure of certain types of business and the introduction of social distancing guidelines, which resulted in the suspension of many work activities. The government has produced a range of guidance for different work sectors which provides advice on how to work safely during the current pandemic. It is important that the current government guidance is considered when determining the precautions that are required in your workplace.

In addition to any measures that are required to reduce risks associated with COVID-19 in the workplace, it is also essential that organisations consider the general health and safety precautions and checks that are required in order that workplaces can be reopened and work activities resumed safely.

## **Discussion**

### **Safety of premises, plant and equipment**

In situations where work premises have been unoccupied for a significant number of weeks, consideration should be given to the safety checks that are required before the site is reoccupied and prior to plant and equipment being used again for the first time. Inspection regimes should be reviewed so that any formal checks that have not been carried out whilst premises are closed can be completed.

### **Compliance with relevant legal requirements**

Whilst there may be modifications to normal work activities during the current pandemic, it is important to note that regulatory and legislative requirements continue to apply in the workplace. It should be ensured that there are no changes to arrangements which could potentially lead to a reduction in health and safety standards in the workplace.

### **Documenting control measures**

As with all workplace hazards, it is recommended that documentation is retained which evidences the control measures that have been implemented to mitigate the risks and captures the thought process behind decision making. In addition to copies of specific risk assessments and procedures that have been completed in response to COVID-19, it would also be advisable to retain other records which demonstrate the control measures that have been implemented to ensure the safety of the workplace upon reopening, such as photographs or video. Where government guidance has been used to determine the necessary control measures, this should be referenced in the relevant documents and changes to risk assessments and procedures should be accurately dated, with version numbers updated accordingly. This will help employers to demonstrate the action that was taken to address specific risks and the guidance that they were following at the time.

The following checklist outlines some of the key considerations for employers when planning for a return to the workplace. The checklist is not exhaustive and further information is available from the references listed in the checklist.

## Guidance

Key Considerations	Further Information	Complete	Action Required
Have you consulted the current government advice on COVID-19?	Consult the current government advice when planning for a resumption of work activities.  <a href="#">Working Safely During Coronavirus (Department for Business, Energy &amp; Industrial Strategy)</a>		
Where required, have you confirmed the availability of 3rd party specialist support for key operations and equipment?	Many organisations will rely on 3rd parties for the provision of certain specialist services, equipment and support and it is important that these 3rd parties are included when planning for workplace activities to recommence.		
Do you need to review arrangements for the cleaning of your workplace prior to reopening?	Consider reviewing the cleaning requirements for your workplace using the current government guidance, and if necessary, produce a formal procedure.		
Are there sufficient cleaning materials and resources to support any increase in cleaning activities?	Refer to the official government guidance to help you determine this.		
Are additional sanitation/cleaning facilities required upon reopening of the building?	Assess the need for additional sanitation/cleaning facilities to reduce the risk of virus transmission, e.g. hand cleaning facilities at entrances and exits.		
Have first aid arrangements been reviewed?	Consider if any changes are required to first aid response arrangements in the event of potential staff absence. You may need to revise your first aid needs assessment.  <a href="#">First Aid (HSE)</a>		
Has consideration been given to any periodic refresher training that may have been missed whilst the workplace has been closed?	Consider reviewing training records to identify any training that needs to be provided.		
Do ventilation and/or air conditioning systems require inspection and have you confirmed compliance with legionella requirements before switching on water & cooling systems?	Where necessary, arrangements should be made for systems to be checked by competent persons and records retained.  <a href="#">Legionnaires' Disease- Technical Guidance (HSE)</a>		

Key Considerations	Further Information	Complete	Action Required
Has the functionality and efficacy of local exhaust ventilation, pressure systems and lifting equipment been verified by a competent person?	Refer to relevant guidance for further information and retain records of safety checks carried out.  <a href="#">LEV - information for employers (HSE)</a>		
Has the functionality and calibration of environmental monitoring equipment, e.g. gas and radiation warning systems, been checked?	Where necessary, arrangements should be made for this equipment to be checked by a competent person and records retained.		
Have you communicated induction information for staff returning to the workplace?	It may be beneficial to issue induction information to staff if they have been away from the workplace for a significant period of time and there are changes to normal work activities.		
Has safe working awareness/operational refresher training for safety critical tasks been provided and recorded for employees returning to work?	If necessary, refresher training should be provided for those involved in safety critical tasks and records retained.		
Have checks of all safety equipment been carried out?	Consider safety equipment such as machinery guards, emergency stops, safety showers, eye washes and spill kits and confirm that necessary checks have been completed and records retained.		
Has a system been implemented for the monitoring of plant & equipment following restart?	It may be necessary to undertake monitoring to confirm that plant and equipment is operating correctly once restarted.		
Is there adequate supervision in place?	Consider if additional supervision is required, when taking into account potential absences and changes to normal site operating arrangements.		
Personal Protective Equipment	Has any new PPE been introduced? If so, has training on fit testing, safe use and disposal been provided and signed for?		

## Conclusion

As work activities are resumed following the restrictions that were implemented in response to the pandemic, it is essential that the return to the workplace is managed effectively. In addition to any measures that are required to reduce risks associated with COVID-19 in the workplace, it is important that organisations also consider the general health and safety precautions and checks that are required in order that work activities can be resumed safely.



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