

New guidance launched to help get Brits safely back to work

- Practical guidelines published today to make workplaces as safe as possible and give people confidence to go back to work during coronavirus pandemic
- documents developed in consultation with approximately 250 businesses, unions, industry leaders as well as devolved administrations
- up to an extra £14 million made available for the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) for extra call centre employees, inspectors and equipment
- guidance provides employers with a downloadable notice businesses should display to show people they have followed the guidance

New 'COVID-19 secure' guidelines are available to UK employers to help them get their businesses back up and running and workplaces operating as safely as possible.

This follows the Prime Minister setting out steps to beat the virus and restart the economy, so we can protect jobs, restore people's livelihoods and fund the country's vital public services.

The government has consulted approximately 250 stakeholders in preparing the guidance. It has been developed with input from firms, unions, industry bodies and the devolved administrations in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales and in consultation with Public Health England (PHE) and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), to develop best practice on the safest ways of working across the economy, providing people with the confidence they need to return to work.

The new guidance covers 8 workplace settings which are allowed to be open, from outdoor environments and construction sites to factories and takeaways. This sets out practical steps for businesses focused on 5 key points, which should be implemented as soon as it is practical:

1. Work from home, if you can

All reasonable steps should be taken by employers to help people work from home. But for those who cannot work from home and whose workplace has not been told to close, our message is clear: you should go to work. Staff should speak to their employer about when their workplace will open.

2. Carry out a COVID-19 risk assessment, in consultation with workers or trade unions

This guidance operates within current health and safety employment and equalities legislation and employers will need to carry out COVID-19 risk assessments in consultation with their workers or trade unions, to establish

what guidelines to put in place. If possible, employers should publish the results of their risk assessments on their website and we expect all businesses with over 50 employees to do so.

3. Maintain 2 metres social distancing, wherever possible

Employers should re-design workspaces to maintain 2 metre distances between people by staggering start times, creating one way walk-throughs, opening more entrances and exits, or changing seating layouts in break rooms.

4. Where people cannot be 2 metres apart, manage transmission risk

Employers should look into putting barriers in shared spaces, creating workplace shift patterns or fixed teams minimising the number of people in contact with one another, or ensuring colleagues are facing away from each other.

5. Reinforcing cleaning processes

Workplaces should be cleaned more frequently, paying close attention to high-contact objects like door handles and keyboards. Employers should provide handwashing facilities or hand sanitisers at entry and exit points.

A downloadable notice is included in the documents, which employers should display in their workplaces to show their employees, customers and other visitors to their workplace, that they have followed this guidance.

Business Secretary Alok Sharma said:

This guidance provides a framework to get the UK back to work in a way that is safe for everyone.

These are practical steps to enable employers to identify risks that COVID-19 creates and to take pragmatic measures to mitigate them.

And as we are able to reopen new sectors of the economy, we will continue our collaborative approach working with a wide range of stakeholders, to provide guidance for additional workplaces.

Sarah Albon Chief Executive, Health and Safety Executive

The BEIS guidance issued today sets out practical steps employers can take to enable staff to continue and return to work. We have worked with BEIS to ensure businesses have access to the

information they need to put in place measures to help them work safely. This will assist employers in carrying out risk assessments and putting practical measures in place.

At the heart of the return to work is controlling the risk posed by the virus. Ensuring safe working practices are in place will help deliver a safe return to work and support businesses across the country.

Craig Beaumont, Director of External Affairs and Advocacy at the Federation of Small Businesses commented:

FSB has engaged through this process with the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy and we appreciate that our points have been taken on board for the UK small business community.

Today's guidance is practical, workable and proportionate for small businesses.

It will be a long journey but this guidance will provide the basis for small employers to have the positive conversations needed with their staff. This is the first step to getting the economy back on its feet.

Carolyn Fairbairn, Director-General of the CBI commented:

Safety is at the heart of business thinking. Unless people feel safe, employees won't return, customers will stay away and the restart will falter, harming livelihoods and public services.

This guidance will help. It gives firms a clearer picture of how to reopen safely and gradually.

The guidance builds on the good proactive plans many firms have developed during lockdown. Excellent employee engagement, fast workplace innovation and transparency have helped many companies support livelihoods. It's right to build on this.

The UK faces months of change and challenge. These guidelines will need to continue to evolve based on insight from the ground.

And employers, employee representatives and relevant enforcement agencies must work together, supporting these plans to build public trust and get our economy back on its feet.

Jonathan Geldart, Director General of the Institute of Directors commented:

This guidance is an important first step. It won't provide every answer, no guidance can, but directors can use it to inform their risk assessments for operating in this pandemic.

Ultimately, the decision lies with a company's directors, and they need to feel comfortable they can operate safely. Decisions on re-opening will not be taken lightly. Business leaders want to stand on their own two feet, but most can't operate at anything like normal capacity at the moment, and making adjustments to protect staff and customers will be a big challenge for many workplaces.

We hope and expect the guidance to evolve over time, but this is a place for employers to start on the long path to getting the economy going again.

The guidance applies to businesses currently open. This also includes guidance for shops which we believe may be in a position to begin a phased reopening at the earliest from the 1 June. Guidance for other sectors that are not currently open will be developed and published ahead of those establishments opening to give those businesses time to plan. The government will also shortly set up taskforces to work with these sectors to develop safe ways for them to open at the earliest point at which it is safe to do so, as well as pilot re-openings to test businesses' ability to adopt the guidelines.

As part of today's announcement, the government has made available up to an extra £14 million for the HSE, equivalent to an increase of 10% of their budget, for extra call centre employees, inspectors and equipment if needed.

Notes to editors

There are 8 workplace guidance documents now available under [Working safely during coronavirus \(COVID-19\) guidance](#).

PM statement in the House of Commons: 11 May 2020

Mr Speaker, with permission, I will make a statement about the next steps in our battle against coronavirus, and how we can, with the utmost caution, gradually begin to rebuild our economy and reopen our society.

For the last two months, the British people have faced a grave threat with common sense, compassion and unflinching resolve.

We have together observed the toughest restrictions on our freedoms in memory, changing our way of life on a scale unimaginable only months ago.

All our efforts have been directed towards protecting our NHS and saving lives.

Tragically, many families have lost loved ones before their time and we share their grief. Yet our shared effort has averted a still worse catastrophe, one that could have overwhelmed the NHS and claimed half a million lives.

Every day, dedicated doctors, nurses, and social care workers, army medics and more have risked their own lives in the service of others, they have helped to cut the Reproduction rate from between 2.6 and 2.8 in April to between 0.5 and 0.9 today.

The number of covid patients in hospital has fallen by over a third since Easter Sunday.

Our armed forces joined our NHS to build new hospitals on timetables that were telescoped from years to weeks, almost doubling the number of critical care beds, and ensuring that since the end of March, at least a third have always been available.

Our challenge now is to find a way forward that preserves our hard won gains, while easing the burden of the lockdown.

And I will be candid with the House: this is a supremely difficult balance to strike.

There could be no greater mistake than to jeopardise everything we have striven to achieve by proceeding too far and too fast.

We will be driven not by hope or economic revival as an end in itself, but by data, and science and public health.

And so the Government is submitting to the House today a plan which is conditional and dependent as always on the common sense and observance of the British people, and on continual re-assessment of the data.

That picture varies across the regions and Home Nations of the United Kingdom, requiring a flexible response. Different parts of the UK may need to stay in full lockdown longer but any divergence should only be short-term because as Prime Minister of the UK, I am in no doubt that we must defeat this threat and face the challenge of recovery together.

Our progress will depend on meeting five essential tests: protecting the NHS, reducing both the daily death toll and the infection rate in a sustained way, ensuring that testing and PPE can meet future demand – a global problem, but one that we must fix, and avoiding a second peak that would overwhelm the NHS.

A new UK-wide Joint Biosecurity Centre will measure our progress with a five-stage Covid Alert System, and the combined effect of our measures so far has been to prevent us from reaching Level Five, a situation that would have seen the NHS overwhelmed, and to hold us at Level Four.

Thanks to the hard work and sacrifice of the British people by following the social distancing rules, we are now in a position where we can move in stages to where I hope the scientific advice will tell us that we are down to Level Three.

But this will only happen if everyone continues to play their part, to stay alert and to follow the rules.

We must also deal with the epidemic in care homes, where a tragic number of the elderly and vulnerable have been lost and while the situation is thankfully improving, there is a vast amount more to be done.

And of course we need a world-leading system for testing and tracking and tracing victims and their contacts so I'm delighted that Baroness Harding, the chair of NHS Improvement, has agreed to take charge of a programme that will ultimately enable us to test hundreds of thousands of people every day.

All this means we have begun our descent from the peak of the epidemic, but our journey has reached the most perilous moment where a wrong move could be disastrous.

So at this stage, we can go no further than to announce the first careful modifications of our measures, Step 1 in moving towards Covid Alert Level 3, a shift in emphasis that we can begin this week.

Anyone who cannot work from home should be actively encouraged to go to work.

And sectors that are allowed to be open should indeed be open, but subject to social distancing.

These include food production, construction, manufacturing, logistics, distribution, scientific research.

And to support this, to explain this again, we are publishing guidance for businesses on how to make these workplaces safe. Covid secure.

People who are able to work from home, as we've continually said, should continue to do so, and people who cannot work from home should talk to their employers about returning this week and the difficulties they may or may not have.

Anyone with covid symptoms obviously – or in a household where someone else has symptoms – should self-isolate.

We want everyone travelling to work to be safe, so people should continue to avoid public transport wherever possible because we must maintain social distancing which will inevitably limit capacity.

Instead people should drive or better still walk or cycle.

With more activity outside our homes, we would now advise people to wear a cloth face covering in enclosed spaces where social distancing is not always possible, and you are more likely to come in contact with people you do not normally meet.

The reason is face coverings can help to protect each other and reduce the spread of the disease, particularly if you have coronavirus like symptoms.

But this does not mean – and I must stress this – this does not mean wearing medical face masks, 2R or FFP3, which must be reserved for people who need them.

We have all lived so far with onerous restrictions Mr Speaker on outdoor spaces and exercise, and this is where my honourable friend interjects as I know he's a keen swimmer and unfortunately we can't do anything for swimming pools but we can do something for lakes and the sea. and this is where we can go significantly further because there is a lower risk from outdoors than indoors.

So from Wednesday there will be no limits on the frequency of outdoor exercise people can take.

You can now walk, sit and rest in parks, you can play sports and exercise, and you can do all these things with members of your own household, or with one other person from another household, provided you observe social distancing and remain 2 metres apart from them.

And I do hope that's clear Mr Speaker. I'm conscious people want to come back and ask questions in more detail and I'd be very happy to answer.

We shall increase the fines for the small minority who break the rules, starting at £100 but doubling with each infringement up to £3,600.

You can drive as far as you like to reach an outdoor space, subject to the same rules and the laws and guidance of the Devolved Administrations.

I am sorry to say however, Mr Speaker, that we shall continue to ask those who are clinically vulnerable – including pregnant women and people over 70, or those with pre-existing chronic conditions – to take particular care to

minimise contact with those outside their households.

And we must continue to shield people who are extremely vulnerable. They should, I am afraid, remain at home and avoid any direct contact with others.

I know that easing restrictions for the many will only increase the anguish of those who must remain shielded, so the Government will look at every possible way of supporting the most vulnerable.

Mr Speaker, all of our precautions will count for little if our country is re-infected from overseas, so I give notice that we shall introduce new restrictions at the UK border, requiring 14 days of self-isolation for international arrivals, while respecting our common travel area with Ireland.

Every day, we shall monitor our progress, and if we stay on the downward slope, and the R remains below 1, then – and only then – will it become safe to go further, and move to the second step.

This will not happen until 1st June at the earliest, but we may then be in a position to start the phased reopening of shops; to return children to early years' settings, including nurseries and childminders; to return primary schools in stages, giving priority to the youngest children in reception and year 1, and those in year 6 preparing for secondary school; and to enable secondary school pupils facing exams next year to get at least some time with their teachers.

Our ambition – and I stress this is conditional Mr Speaker – is for all primary school pupils to return to the classroom for a month before the summer break.

To those ends, we are publishing guidance on how schools might reopen safely.

Step two could also include allowing cultural and sporting events behind closed doors for broadcast, which I think would provide a much needed boost to national morale.

But nothing can substitute for human contact and so the Government has asked SAGE when and how we could safely allow people to expand their household group to include one other household, on a strictly reciprocal basis.

Finally, and no earlier than July, we may be able to move to step three – if and only if supported by the data, and the best scientific advice.

We would then aim to reopen some remaining businesses, including potentially hospitality, cinemas and hairdressers as well as places of worship and leisure facilities.

And this will depend on maintaining social distancing and new ways of providing services, so we will phase and pilot any re-openings to ensure public safety.

And I must be clear again: if the data goes the wrong way, if the Alert Level begins to rise, we will have no hesitation in putting on the brakes, delaying

or reintroducing measures – locally, regionally or nationally.

Mr Speaker, our struggle against this virus has placed our country under the kind of strain that will be remembered for generations.

But so too has the response of the British people, from dedicated shopworkers keeping our supermarkets open, and ingenious teachers finding new ways of inspiring their pupils, to the kindness of millions who have checked on their neighbours, delivered food for the elderly, or raised astonishing amounts for charity.

In these and in so many other ways, we are seeing the indomitable spirit of Britain

And Mr speaker let me summarise by saying that people should Stay Alert by working from home if you possibly can, by limiting contact with other people, by keeping your distance 2 metres apart where possible – by washing your hands regularly, and if you or anyone in your household has symptoms, you all need to self-isolate.

Because if everyone stays alert and follows the rules, we can control the virus, keep the rate of infection down and the keep number of infections down.

And this Mr Speaker is how we can continue to save lives, and livelihoods, as we begin to recover from coronavirus, and I commend this statement to the House.

30,000 stranded Brits returned to the UK on Government charter flights

The first flight to bring British travellers back to the UK following the outbreak departed Wuhan on January 31, and the 30,000th passenger to return home to the UK landed on a special charter flight from Amritsar, northern India, on Saturday evening.

The Foreign Office has been working around the clock with the airline industry and host governments across the world to help bring back British travellers as part of a major plan announced by Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab on 30 March. Up to £75 million has been made available for special charter flights to priority countries, focused on helping the most vulnerable travellers.

So far, charter flights have returned British nationals to the UK from countries ranging from Bolivia to Bermuda and New Zealand to Nepal.

The countries with the greatest numbers of British travellers returning on Government charter flights include:

- More than 13,500 British nationals from India on 58 flights since 8 April.
- More than 4,000 British nationals on 19 flights from Pakistan since 20 April.
- More than 2,000 British nationals from South Africa from 9-17 April.
- More than 1,500 British nationals from New Zealand since 25 April.
- Around 1,600 British nationals from Bangladesh since 21 April.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

On top of the 1.3 million Britons we've helped return on commercial flights, we've now brought back 30,000 UK travellers from twenty-seven countries.

We remain tirelessly focused on helping the most vulnerable Brits around the world get back home safe and sound.

Since the outbreak in Wuhan, it is also estimated that over 1.3 million people – more than 14 times the capacity of Wembley stadium – have returned to the UK via commercial routes.

Keeping commercial options running has required enormous international effort, with teams in the UK and in our Embassies and Consulates around the world working 24/7 to help overcome this unprecedented challenge.

The majority of these routes were supported by the work of the FCO with airlines and foreign governments to keep vital transit hubs open and ensure that domestic restrictions don't pose a barrier to getting people home.

For example, we have helped 200,000 passengers return from Spain on commercial routes, as well as 50,000 passengers from Australia, 11,700 from Pakistan, 9,000 from Morocco and around 7,000 from Indonesia. Around 300 British nationals have returned from Kenya on five commercial flights, which would not have been possible without the work of our High Commission in Nairobi.

Case studies:

- Our efforts have seen a group of volunteers rescued from a remote part of Madagascar, climbers extracted from mountains in Nepal by British Gurkhas, and backpackers reunited with their families after being flown home from South America.
- In one case, staff in India masterminded a 60-hour, 1,700 mile long trip involving five different drivers and crossing seven states, even receiving a police escort at one point, to make sure a British citizen

could take one of our special return flights to the UK.

- Meanwhile, our team in Saudi Arabia helped an oil worker to return to the UK in time for the birth of his son, despite a strict lockdown, and our Embassy in Sudan helped two doctors make it back to join the NHS frontline.

More than 19,000 British passengers who were aboard 60 cruise ships when the FCO changed travel advice on 17 March have all now disembarked. The FCO helped passengers return home by providing consular assistance, working with local authorities, local military teams and cruise operators to allow ships to dock.

The FCO will continue to send charter flights to bring back vulnerable British nationals who have no other way to return to the UK.

A package of measures to support British nationals who are still waiting to return to the UK has also been put in place. The support package addresses financial issues, healthcare concerns and visa extensions, as well as loans for those who cannot afford flights to the UK where they have exhausted all other options.

ENDS

Background:

- The flight from Amritsar landed at Heathrow Airport at 2020hrs on May 09.

Media enquiries

Email – newsdesk@fco.gov.uk

Further information

Follow the Foreign Office on Twitter [@foreignoffice](https://twitter.com/foreignoffice) and [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/foreignoffice)

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Public advised to cover faces in enclosed spaces

- People who use public transport or visit shops should consider covering their mouth and nose, based on advice from SAGE
- Face coverings are not a replacement for social distancing and regular

handwashing which remain the most important actions, says Chief Medical Officer

- Public urged not to buy medical grade masks so they can be saved for frontline health and care workers, but instead make their own face coverings at home

The public is advised to consider wearing face coverings in enclosed public spaces where you may be more likely to come into contact with people you do not normally meet, the government announced today.

After careful consideration of the latest scientific evidence from the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), the government confirmed face coverings can help reduce the risk of transmission in some circumstances.

Face coverings can help us protect each other and reduce the spread of the disease if you are suffering from coronavirus, but not showing symptoms. People with coronavirus symptoms, as well as members of their household, should continue to follow the [advice to self isolate](#).

They may be beneficial in places where it is hard to follow maintain social distancing measures. This applies when using public transport, such as trains, buses and metro systems, or when visiting shops.

They do not need to be worn outdoors, while exercising, in schools, in workplaces such as offices, and retail, or by those who may find them difficult to wear, such as children under two or primary aged children who cannot use them without assistance, or those who may have problems breathing whilst wearing a face covering.

The public is being strongly urged not to purchase surgical masks or respirators, which are prioritised for healthcare workers working in more high-risk environments where the risk is greatest.

Instead the public is encouraged to make face coverings at home, using scarves or other textile items, which many will already own. [Read the guidance on how to wear and make a cloth face covering](#).

Health Minister Jo Churchill said:

At all times our strategy for keeping the public and the NHS safe during this crisis has been guided by the science.

Today, thanks to the evidence provided by our expert scientists, we are advising people to consider wearing a face covering if they can in enclosed public spaces where social distancing is impossible, for example on public transport or in shops. This may help prevent you spreading the virus to others.

You do not need a clinical mask which are prioritised for our healthcare workers. Instead a face covering is sufficient and we encourage people to make these at home with items they will already

own.

Professor Chris Whitty, Chief Medical Officer said:

Wearing a face covering is an added precaution, that may have some benefit in reducing the likelihood that a person with the infection passes it on.

The most effective means of preventing the spread of this virus remains following social distancing rules and washing your hands regularly. It does not remove the need to self-isolate if you have symptoms.

COVID-19 can be spread directly by droplets from coughs, sneezes, and speaking. These droplets can also be picked up from surfaces by touch and subsequently from touching the face. That is why hand hygiene is so important in controlling the infection.

Evidence shows a face covering can help in reducing the spread of droplets and therefore potentially infecting others, and could help to reduce the spread of infection as lockdown measures start to be lifted. It is important the public refrains from touching their face covering when wearing it, where possible, to avoid hand to mask transmission of the virus.

Government will not be supplying face coverings centrally as at home items and fabrics readily available on the market can be used, but it is important to wash them after every use.

Research from the WHO showed that where masks were recommended for prolonged periods of time, some wearers failed to maintain good handwashing practices or follow social distancing policies, putting others at risk. As England has demonstrated strong adherence to social distancing, the government is confident face coverings can be recommended as an added precaution in certain environments rather than an essential part of social distancing policies.

For workers in various sectors, or in public transport, the government is advising they continue to follow the advice of their employers and make sensible workplace adjustments. Further guidance on safer workplaces and on transport will be published shortly.

Government has produced guidance for employees and in it they emphasise and reassure employers that for the majority the most effective way they can ensure that their employees are safe at work is to make sensible workplace adjustments, including erecting perspex screens which many supermarkets have already introduced.

Face coverings do not need to be worn in schools.

Tech stopping the inspection blues

News story

How do we make sure the complex equipment being fabricated by our suppliers is up to the right standards during a lockdown?



The Box Encapsulation Plant project team carrying out inspections using Microsoft Teams

It's questions like this that may not have been the first things we thought of as a potential problem when the crisis hit, but they still need sorting.

For our Box Encapsulation Plant (BEP) project team it has meant the successful innovative use of the kind of technology that's becoming the norm across our business for keeping in touch.

Microsoft Teams wasn't even on our radar a couple of months ago, but the team are now using it to successfully conduct highly complex inspections on stainless steel equipment, miles away.

Deputy Project Manager for BEP Mike Critchley said:

During this ongoing lockdown period, a projects task team have been working with the Inspection and Quality Assurance Department to look at ways we could help the supply chain to continue work.

This highlighted several areas where we have had to adopt a 'do things differently' attitude and move away from the traditional way of attending the supplier works' to confirm the quality of the product.

We wanted to restart inspection whilst maintaining the safety of everyone involved. We need to maintain design intent through inspections and factory acceptance tests.

One of the first examples of this is testing stainless steel equipment. Luckily, it's a visual process – if iron is present (meaning the steel isn't quite up to standard), it reacts with potassium ferricyanide and goes blue.

The team worked with our Joint Venture team, with Joint Venture Quality Manager Shaun Lees helping to revise the existing process and approving documentation.

BEP Quality Manager Dave Tracey added:

The ferroxyl test was witnessed remotely using Microsoft Teams while interacting with the on-site inspector. We recorded the live streams, which means we have it available for assessment and auditing.

It worked brilliantly and we think it could be used for other inspections, such as manufacturing process steps, nondestructive tests, product and packaging, and marking.

Microsoft Teams is being rolled out across the organisation to help our employees stay connected during the crisis.

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