Before contacting HSE, check if your question and the answer to it is listed below.

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PPE

1. **What does PPE mean?**

   Personal protective equipment (PPE) is the term used for equipment provided to protect people from health or safety risks at work. Employers have legal duties concerning the provision and use of PPE, including ensuring it is CE marked in accordance with the Personal Protective Equipment Regulations 2002.

   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 or respirators, commonly called face masks. Face coverings that people have chosen to wear to avoid transmission of coronavirus are not PPE.

2. **I already use PPE at work to protect against health and safety risks. Do I need extra PPE for the risks of coronavirus?**

   There are very few workplaces where additional PPE is required to protect from the risks of coronavirus. The main controls to protect people are through social distancing, good hygiene (frequent cleaning and handwashing), working in fixed teams or partnering, and not through the use of PPE.

   There are a small number of settings where there are exceptions such as clinical settings, eg hospitals and a small number of other roles and settings for which Public Health England advises the use of PPE to reduce the risks from coronavirus. To find out if your work is in this group you should refer to the advice at: [www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-personal-protective-equipment-ppe](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-personal-protective-equipment-ppe) and check the specific guidance for your work setting at: [www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19)

3. **Should I use PPE or ask others I work with to use it to manage the risk of coronavirus?**

   Apart from the small number of settings where PPE is advised to manage the risks of coronavirus, there is no need to use additional PPE. Risks should be managed through social distancing, good hygiene (frequent cleaning and handwashing), ventilation, working in fixed teams or partnering, not by using PPE.

   Supplies of PPE, including face masks, should continue to be reserved for those who need PPE to protect against workplace risks, such as people exposed to dust and fume hazards as well as healthcare workers.
4. I normally use PPE to control a process risk in my workplace. What can I do if I cannot get hold of my normal supply?

There are several options to consider, for example you could:

- find other sources of supply;
- find ways of reducing the risk without needing to use PPE;
- check that you are efficiently managing the provision and use of PPE within your business;
- use alternative equipment that provides at least the same level of protection (eg RPE with an Assigned Protection Factor (APF) of 40 instead of 20; powered respirators instead of disposable).

You should look for PPE that is CE marked, provided with a declaration of conformity and with accompanying instructions in English. If a European Standard has been applied, it will be specified on the Declaration of Conformity.

5. Do I need to require anyone in my business to wear a face covering? Should I support workers who have chosen to wear a face covering?

Face coverings are not classed as PPE. They are not manufactured to a standard and don’t provide a proven level of protection for work risks such as dust and spray in an industrial context.

Wearing a face covering is optional and not required in the workplace. Face coverings are not an effective way to manage the risks from coronavirus and you should not rely on them. The evidence suggests that wearing a face covering does not protect you, but it may protect others if you are infected and have not developed symptoms.

Social distancing, including minimising time spent in contact, using fixed teams and partnering for close-up work, and increasing hand and surface washing are shown to manage the risks. You can find specific guidance on working safely here: [http://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19)

If people choose to wear face coverings in their work then you should support them to use them safely.
Home visits

1. Can I do a job for someone who’s self-isolating?

No work should be carried out in a household which is isolating because one or more family members has symptoms of coronavirus – unless it is to repair something causing a risk to the people in the house.

For landlord’s gas safety checks – please see advice on the Gas Safe Register website for advice on whether a landlord’s gas safety check should go ahead:

2. Can I do a job for someone vulnerable (eg over-70s)?

Yes, but you should communicate with households prior to any visit to discuss how the work will be carried out to minimise the risk for all parties. Prior arrangements should be made with vulnerable people to avoid any face-to-face contact, for example, when answering the door.

You should be particularly strict about handwashing, coughing and sneezing hygiene such as covering you nose and mouth and disposing of single-use tissues.

You should practice social distancing as far as possible, preferably householders should wait in another room during your visit.

3. Do I need to wear a face mask?

If you normally use a face mask for work to stop you being exposed to work hazards such as wood dust then you should carry on using this as before. If you are doing a home visit for one of the small number of roles that requires PPE to protect from coronavirus then you should wear a mask.

If you are not in one of the small number of roles that needs PPE for the risks of coronavirus and don’t need masks for workplace hazards then you do not need to wear a face mask.

4. What should I do if a householder comes closer than the social distancing rules to me?

Remind the householder of the social distancing requirements and that they are for both parties’ safety. If the householder still will not keep a safe distance then you should leave the room, ensuring it is safe to do so and that all work is left in a safe condition.
5. **I am an employer of home visiting staff. What should I do?**

Wherever possible, use digital or remote alternatives to physical, in-home work such as video or phone consultations. Your assessment of risk should help you to identify when this may be possible.

If a physical visit is needed, then following your risk assessment, you should discuss with householders and clients what they and you need to do to keep safe. This will include discussing how the work will be carried out.

You should equip staff with handwashing and other cleaning supplies and inform them how and when to use them. You should make sure all staff understand social distancing requirements.

You should keep in touch with workers about working arrangements in place to protect them including welfare, mental and physical health and personal security.

6. **I am in a clinically vulnerable category; can I do home visits?**

If you are clinically vulnerable and cannot work from home, you should be offered the safest available on-site role, enabling you to follow social distancing rules away from others. Where this is not possible, your employer must assess whether the activity involves an acceptable level of risk and discuss this with you.

Employers must put arrangements in place to protect workers if they have ‘protected characteristics’. For example, expectant mothers who are, as always, entitled to suspension on full pay if suitable roles cannot be found.

7. **It’s impossible to do this work and maintain the social distancing requirements – should I do it?**

Businesses and workplaces should make every reasonable effort to comply with the social distancing guidelines set out by government.

You may identify circumstances where social distancing guidelines cannot be followed in relation to a particular activity. In the first instance you should see if you can do the work in a different way so that social distancing can be maintained.

If the task can’t be changed then you should consider whether the activity needs to continue for the business to operate. If so, then you will need to take action to reduce the risk of transmission as far as possible. This will include considering putting in place other measures to reduce the risk such as using screens or barriers. You should also consider increasing the frequency of handwashing, keeping the activity time (where social distancing is not possible) as short as possible and other cleaning and sanitising regimes.
8. **Can we travel to site in one vehicle?**

Where insurance allows, use individual vehicles. If workers have no option but to travel together you should ensure journeys are with the same individuals, maintain good ventilation with passengers facing away from one another to reduce the risk of transmission.

Vehicles should be frequently cleaned with an emphasis on handles and other high-touch surfaces. Ensure hands are washed on arrival and social distancing is maintained when entering the home.

9. **I may be on site for a while, what should I do?**

Follow social distancing procedures, wash and sanitise hands frequently, bring your own food and drink to households and take breaks outside where possible. If you need to use welfare facilities, clean door handles etc, before and after you use them.

10. **What should I do with waste on site?**

Agree with the householder how you will safely dispose of waste such as used paper towels. Remove waste and belongings from the work area at the end of the day/job. Ensure the work area is cleaned before you leave.

**Social distancing**

1. **We need to use a passenger lift, but can’t socially distance, what do we do?**

Identify times of the day when the lift will be in frequent use – eg start/end of day and at break times. Consider rearranging working patterns, reducing the number of people on site and other measures such as staggering start/finish/break times to reduce the numbers needing to use a lift at any one time. This should also reduce queues for lifts where people may congregate. People who are fit enough to walk upstairs should be encouraged to do so.

When people use lifts they should face the sides of the lift car with their backs towards other passengers. Mark spaces on lift floors using tape to help people keep their distance from other passengers and to remind them to face away from people in the lift. You may also need to reduce safe lift capacities to do this.

Ensure regular cleaning and sanitation of lift controls and the passenger car and consider placing hand sanitiser near lift controls/push buttons with signs encouraging people to use it.
2. **What can we do if we need to pass things to each other at work?**

Identify areas where people have to directly pass things to each other. This could include passing job information, orders, spare parts, samples and raw materials. In the first instance find ways to remove direct contact. This could for example include providing paperwork electronically, using drop-off points or transfer zones.

Consider how you can minimise contact during exchanges, for example by using electronically signed documents.

Ensure increase in frequency of hand washing and cleaning of shared surfaces or objects.

3. **We can’t move workstations apart to follow social distancing rules so what do we do?**

If you can’t move workstations apart to follow social distancing rules then you should consider:

- assigning one person per work area
- reducing the number of people in the work area so the number of people working less than social distancing rules apart is minimal
- avoiding people working face-to-face – instead work side-by-side or back-to-back
- consider using screens to create a physical barrier between people.

You should also limit the amount of contact between different workers by assigning and keeping people in shift teams (sometimes known as a cohort). This means that the same people work within the same team, on the same shift.

Regular cleaning and sanitation of work areas should be carried out to prevent transmission by touching contaminated surfaces.

Specific guidance for your type of business, which includes a section on cleaning, is available on GOV.UK: [www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19)

4. **We have pinch-points in corridors and stairs, how can we manage this?**

Allow only essential trips within buildings, sites and properties, to maintain social distancing as much as possible. By limiting the number of people moving around you are also reducing the number of people in high traffic areas including corridors and stairs.

If possible, arrange one-way systems with arrows on the floor to prevent crossing in narrow spaces and ensure all staff know to make space for each other.
5. What do I need to do in common areas?

Social distancing should be maintained in common areas of your business, such as canteens, toilets, showers and changing facilities. Staggering breaktimes will reduce the number of people using common areas at the same time and should reduce queues for the facilities.

In break areas and canteens physically move seating and tables to maintain spacing and reduce face-to-face interactions. Where this is not possible, mark areas using floor paint or tape to help people social distance.

Create additional space using other parts of the workplace or building that may have been freed up by remote working or consider using outside areas for breaks if you have suitable and safe areas.

Put in place frequent cleaning and sanitation of all common areas of your business to prevent transmission by touching contaminated surfaces.

6. We can’t follow social distancing rules everywhere in our workplace – is this allowed?

Workplaces should make every reasonable effort to comply with the social distancing guidelines set out by the government. Where the social distancing guidelines cannot be followed businesses should consider whether the activity needs to continue for the business to operate.

If so, businesses should take action to reduce the risk of transmission between people. Actions include:

- increasing the frequency of handwashing 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).

Specific guidance for your type of business, which includes a section on cleaning, is available on GOV.UK:
7. Can we still hold meetings?

Use remote working tools to avoid face-to-face meetings. If this is not possible, only absolutely necessary participants should attend and social distancing should be maintained at all times.

Where possible, hold meetings outdoors or in well-ventilated rooms and avoid sharing equipment such as pens or other objects to reduce the risk of transmission.

In areas regularly used for meetings consider using tape or floor paints to mark areas to help people follow social distancing rules.

Provide hand sanitiser and ensure frequent cleaning and sanitation of all meeting areas.

8. How can we make staff meals safer?

Staggering breaktimes can reduce pressure on break rooms or canteens meaning that social distancing can be maintained.

Physically moving seating and tables in break rooms or canteens to keep spacing and reduce face-to-face interactions is a good way to reduce the risks.

Encourage workers to bring their own food to work, alternatively, provide packaged meals or a take away service. Workers should be encouraged to remain on-site and, if this is not possible, maintain social distancing while off-site.

Employee

1. I think I’ve seen someone else working without respecting social distancing or good hygiene, who should I tell?

In the first instance you should raise this with your employer so they can take any necessary action. This may include talking to the person, providing additional training or reviewing the risk assessment to see if there are steps that need to be taken to improve social distancing or good hygiene procedures.

If your workplace has a union representative, they also may be able to talk to your employer if there are concerns about social distancing and hygiene practices in your workplace.

If you have talked to your employer and, where available, your union representative and believe that there is still an ongoing risk in your workplace relating to social distancing and good hygiene then you may wish to raise a concern.
Depending on the type of work you do you may need to contact your local authority to report concerns. Please visit: www.hse.gov.uk/contact/authority.htm for more information about who you need to raise a concern with.

If your workplace is HSE enforced, you can report a coronavirus concern:

- online using our concerns form: https://webcommunities.hse.gov.uk/connect.ti/concernsform/answerQuestionnaire?qid=594147
- by telephone: 0300 790 6787

2. *Is my employer right to expect me to return to work?*

Some workplaces have now returned to work following restrictions being lifted. To decide if your workplace falls into this category please visit: www.gov.uk/government/publications/further-businesses-and-premises-to-close/further-businesses-and-premises-to-close-guidance#businesses-and-venues-that-must-remain-closed

If you are clinically extremely vulnerable you are strongly advised not to work outside the home. Your employer should help you to work from home, either in your current role or in an alternative role.

If you live with someone who is clinically extremely vulnerable, then current guidelines do not require you to ‘shield’. However, you should do what you can to protect the shielded person in your home. Talk to your employer about what you can do to protect the shielded person in your home so they can assess the risks involved and agree with you the best way to protect them. This may include working from home yourself.

If you are clinically vulnerable and you cannot work from home, your employer should offer you the option of the safest available on-site role that allows you to follow social distancing rules. If you can’t follow social distancing rules, your employer should carefully assess the risk with you and decide whether this is an acceptable level of risk.

Your employer must put arrangements in place to protect workers if they have ‘protected characteristics’. For example, expectant mothers who are, as always, entitled to suspension on full pay if suitable roles cannot be found.

Your employer should have completed a coronavirus risk assessment and told you how risks will be managed when you return if you are not currently self-isolating or in one of the above categories.
If you still have concerns about returning to work you should ask your employer questions about what is in place to protect you. If your employer requires you to return to work and you still have concerns, then discuss it with your trade union representative if you have one, or ACAS may be able to mediate.

Further guidance on returning to work and information about how to raise a concern can be found here: www.acas.org.uk/coronavirus/returning-to-the-workplace


Guidance on who is clinically vulnerable can be found here: www.gov.uk/government/publications/full-guidance-on-staying-at-home-and-away-from-others#eel-decline

3. **If my employer doesn’t have cleaning products or distancing marks on the floor in line with their assessment should I report them to you?**

In the first instance you should raise this with your employer so they can take the necessary steps to correct this. If you have a trade union representative, they may also be able to help work with employers to provide cleaning products and distancing marks where needed.

If you have talked to your employer and, where available, your union representative and believe that there is still an ongoing risk in your workplace relating to social distancing and good hygiene then you may wish to raise a concern.

Depending on the type of work you do you may need to contact your local authority to report concerns. Please visit: www.hse.gov.uk/contact/authority.htm for more information about who you need to raise a concern with.

If your workplace is HSE enforced, you can raise a coronavirus concern:

- online using our concerns form: https://webcommunities.hse.gov.uk/connect.ti/concernsform/answerQuestionnaire?qid=594147
- by telephone: 0300 790 6787
4. **What are the minimum requirements for cleaning hands?**

Washing your hands with soap for at least 20 seconds is the best way to clean hands. Regular hand washing for 20 seconds and/or sanitising is the main way to clean any potential contamination from your hands and dry them with paper towels or hand dryers. If soap and water isn’t available, then alcohol hand sanitiser is recommended.

5. **If I can do my work from home, should I travel to work?**

If you can do your work at home then you should. Frequently asked questions and advice on what you can do during the outbreak can be found here: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do)

6. **I think the air conditioning at work is a risk to my health – should my employer do something about it?**

General government guidance is to provide good ventilation in workplaces to reduce the risks from coronavirus. The risk of air conditioning spreading coronavirus is extremely low.

If you are using a fully mechanical centralised air conditioning system that removes and circulates air into multiple rooms then it is best practice to avoid recirculation of air where possible. All of these types of systems should have the facility to turn off recirculation and use a fresh air supply.

If you are using an air conditioning system in individual rooms or a portable unit, these operate on recirculation and should be allowed to operate.

Most air conditioning systems do not need adjustment, however where systems serve multiple buildings, or you are unsure, advice should be sought from your heating ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) engineers or advisers.

Good ventilation – including using air conditioning – is encouraged to reduce the likelihood of the spread of the virus.

7. **Are there any businesses that are prohibited from returning to work?**

During the phased reduction of lockdown measures different workplaces are returning at different times.

8. **How can I get to work safely?**

   Government advice is to avoid using public transport wherever possible to get to and from work by either cycling, walking or driving.

   If the only way you can get to work is by using public transport then this guidance will provide you with further information: [www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-travel-guidance-for-passengers](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-travel-guidance-for-passengers)

**Employer**

1. **What are the basics we must complete before returning to work?**

   The starting point to decide what you need to do before going back to work is assess and decide how you are going to control the risks of coronavirus in your workplace. HSE provides information and guidance on assessing the risks here: [www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/risk/index.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/risk/index.htm)

   The government, in consultation with industry, has published a series of guides covering a range of different workplaces. The guides provide information for you to consider when assessing the risks including information on social distancing and hygiene procedures. The guides can be found here: [www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19)

   HSE has also published a short guide and talking toolkit here: [www.hse.gov.uk/news/working-safely-during-coronavirus-outbreak.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/news/working-safely-during-coronavirus-outbreak.htm) that provides information and guidance on completing your assessment and involving your employees.

   HSE also provides information on a range of topics relating to the coronavirus outbreak here: [www.hse.gov.uk/news/coronavirus.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/news/coronavirus.htm)

2. **If an employee tells me they feel unsafe returning to work, what should I do?**

   If your employee is clinically extremely vulnerable you should not ask them to work outside the home. You should help the employee to work from home, either in their current role or in an alternative role.

   If your employee is clinically vulnerable and cannot work from home, you should offer the option of the safest available on-site role that allows them to follow social distancing rules. If they can’t socially distance, you should carefully assess the risk with the employee and decide whether this is an acceptable level of risk.
If your employee lives with someone who is clinically extremely vulnerable then current guidelines are that they themselves do not need to ‘shield’. However, they should do what they can to protect the shielded person in their home. You should talk to your employee about what you need to do to assess the risks involved and agree with them the best way to protect the shielded person. This may include working from home.

If your employee is in a protected group of people, such as an expectant mother, they are, as always, entitled to suspension on full pay if suitable roles cannot be found.

If your employee is not in any of the above categories then you may be able to talk your employee through the completed coronavirus risk assessment you did before people returned to work. This may reassure the employee that you have measures in place to protect them. If they are still concerned, talk to them about what concerns they still have and discuss what can be done to solve the problem.

If your employee refuses to return to work because they still have concerns then this would be covered by employment law. You would need to get specific legal advice to decide on the action you need to take.

Further guidance on returning to work and information about how to raise a concern can be found here: www.acas.org.uk/coronavirus/returning-to-the-workplace
Guidance on who is clinically vulnerable can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/full-guidance-on-staying-at-home-and-away-from-others/full-guidance-on-staying-at-home-and-away-from-others#eel-decline

3. How will we use coronavirus testing to improve work availability?

For further advice on who can be tested and when please refer to the resources here: www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-getting-tested

4. Are there new legal obligations arising for employers?

No. Your duties under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 remain the same in relation to managing risks in work such as coronavirus. The government guidance at: www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19 sets out what to consider when putting in place measures to protect your employees.
5. How can I reassure members of staff and the public that we're following the right protocols?

HM Government provides a sign you can download and display at prominent points:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5eb97021d3bf7f5d43765cbf/staying-covid-19-secure-accessible.pdf

6. We have a fire drill due, which will cause some crowding on escape routes. Am I allowed to postpone?

Fire drills are a part of your company’s general fire precaution plan and are one of the ways you can ensure that you have all the correct procedures in place should a fire break out. The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) have published guidance to help you manage the fire risks in your business:
http://www.nationalfirechiefs.org.uk/write/MediaUploads/COVID-19/Protection%20documents/NFCC_Protection_-_COVID-19_Protection_Advice_to_Businesses_-_9_April_-_FINAL.pdf

7. If there’s a chance an employee contracted coronavirus through work, do we need to complete a RIDDOR report?

There are occasions when you may need to report if an employee has contracted coronavirus through their work. Please see the guidance available on the HSE website about RIDDOR reporting in relation to the coronavirus outbreak:

8. How can I maintain health and safety related accreditations such as first aider training?

HSE has provided guidance on the requirements for first aid training during the coronavirus outbreak that can be found here:

If you have employees with refresher training due for equipment then discuss with your training provider how you might be able to do refresher training in another way.
**Further information**

For information about health and safety, or to report inconsistencies or inaccuracies in this guidance, visit [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk).

You can order HSE priced publications at [https://books.hse.gov.uk](https://books.hse.gov.uk). HSE priced publications are also available from bookshops.

This guidance is issued by the Health and Safety Executive. Following the guidance is not compulsory, unless specifically stated, and you are free to take other action. But if you do follow the guidance you will normally be doing enough to comply with the law. Health and safety inspectors seek to secure compliance with the law and may refer to this guidance.

This document is available at: [https://www.hse.gov.uk/contact/assets/docs/](https://www.hse.gov.uk/contact/assets/docs/)

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