

## Easing of COVID-19 Restrictions: Returning to work safely – business considerations

The arrival of spring brings with it the hope of a brighter future. As lockdown restrictions are eased, we will see a host of sectors re-opening including non-essential retail, personal care services and the re-opening of hospitality venues, most outdoor attractions and settings, and indoor leisure facilities.

Over the coming weeks and months businesses, some of which have been closed for a significant period of time, will be making plans to re-open safely. Reopening the economy, while continuing to combat coronavirus (COVID-19) creates many challenges, requiring businesses and workers to follow new ways of working.

There is a wealth of guidance on COVID19 compliance on the HSE [website](#), with more available elsewhere, and **ALL** businesses are reminded of their legal duty to conduct a COVID risk assessment before re-opening. This aide memoire highlights a variety of other risks, in addition to those associated with COVID19, which may be applicable to your business.

Each business is different, so there may be things, particular to your business that are not listed, but this will help you begin your preparations to ensure your employees and others affected by your business can move out of lockdown safely.

### Workplace considerations:

- a) **Ventilation** - take simple steps to improve airflow in enclosed spaces as good ventilation helps reduce how much virus is in the air. Further information is available [here](#).
- b) **Legionella** - if your business has been closed or had reduced occupancy during the pandemic, water system stagnation can occur due to lack of use, increasing the risk of Legionnaires' disease. Businesses providing showers, backwash basins, hot tubs etc or those with air conditioning units, evaporative condensers or cooling towers that generate aerosols will need to be mindful of the increased risk and ensure risk assessments are reviewed before systems are restarted. [Detailed guidance on Legionella risks during the coronavirus pandemic](#) is available on the HSE website.
- c) **Equipment** – Some equipment stored unused for long periods of time may have deteriorated, so where necessary check/inspect/service/recommission before you need to use it. Further information is available [here](#).
- d) **Cleaning** - Increase how often you clean surfaces, equipment and facilities especially in places where people will touch the same items frequently. Further information is available [here](#).

### People considerations:

- a) **Availability** - Many businesses utilise the services of casual/agency workers, and in some instances permanent workers may have been released because of financial pressures on the business. You should allow plenty of time to find the people you need, because those you previously relied on may have found alternative employment and may be unwilling to return when you need them.
- b) **Knowledge** - Workers who have been idle, or who have been engaged in alternative employment may have experienced a decline in their ability or proficiency caused by a period of non-use. This is sometimes referred to as "skill fade". Anyone in this position will need additional time and support to get back to where they were pre-pandemic.
- c) **Fitness** - As well as skill fade, people who have been inactive may have seen a decline in their fitness levels, increasing the risk of injury or MSDs. Where physical fitness is necessary

for a role, for example by housekeeping staff or lifeguards, it is worth considering how workers can be supported to regain their pre-Covid fitness levels.

- d) **Vulnerable workers** - make sure you consider the risk to workers who are clinically extremely vulnerable to COVID-19 and put controls in place to reduce that risk.
- e) **Mental health & Wellbeing** – Returning to the workplace may be difficult for some employees making them more susceptible to workplace stress. Situations such as mixing with others, dealing with members of the public etc may be particularly challenging. Talking to your employees is an important step to help manage such concerns, if you need help in planning how to do this we have some helpful advice [here](#).