



Getting Back to Work – far from BAU

Guidance from HDI Global SE and risk control experts RiskSTOP on returning to the workplace post-COVID-19

As the government starts to indicate that they may be looking to relax the restrictions on non-front-line employees getting back to work, it is imperative that businesses ensure that this is undertaken in a methodical and well thought out manner. Employers have a responsibility under the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 to protect the 'health, safety and welfare' at work of all their employees, as well as others on their premises, including temporary workers, casual workers, the self-employed, clients, visitors and the general public.

We are now all aware of the impact COVID-19 has had across the country, and indeed globally. Businesses will have to be sure that they have fully assessed the risks presented by the disease and will need to potentially adapt previous working practices in a manner which will keep their staff and all other people safe in both the short and medium term.

Employees' health, safety and well-being throughout this pandemic will be of paramount importance to all employers. Employers have a statutory duty of care for people's health and safety, and to provide a safe place to work, but there's also a strong moral responsibility to ensure that employees feel safe and secure in their employment. Employers need to be proactive to protect their people and to help to minimise the risk of the virus spreading.

The health and safety risks arising from COVID-19 primarily arise from person to person contact, transmission through close proximity to infected individuals and surface transmission. This means it is vital that employers consider what steps can be taken to minimise the risk of the virus entering their premises and infecting its people and visitors and, if it does, having a quick response protocol to stop it spreading.

Other areas that will need consideration could also include fully assessing any new aspects to the business which have resulted due to the pandemic, i.e. new manufacturing lines which may have been put together in haste. These will need to be fully assessed to ensure that they do not bring any additional hazards to business operations which in turn could potentially harm staff.

Clearly, these are just some initial thoughts. As much of this guidance touches on H&S issues, suitable legal opinion should be sought as well as the involvement and consultation of relevant staff consultation bodies.

It is important that employers establish a return to work plan, which should involve all key stakeholders (including, where appropriate, those responsible for health & safety within the business, trade unions, fire marshalls and your Human Resources team) in advance of the recommencement of operations.

HDI, in collaboration with our risk control partners RiskSTOP, have collated a list of key questions business leaders should consider before heading back to work. You can find these on the proceeding pages.

More specific guidance is available for HDI Global SE clients and policyholders from David Reynolds and the RiskSTOP team via the RiskSTOP Technical Helpline – please call 01305 215587

Considerations for the workplace

- Do all staff need to work from site, or can some continue to work from home?
- Where staff are working from home, have you assessed their working environment and do you keep in regular contact with them to gauge and support their mental wellbeing?
- Can staff be brought back to work on a phased basis to enable those responsible for health & safety to assess the alterations that have been made to the working operations before a full complement of staff are brought back?
- Can work be undertaken on a shift basis, thereby reducing the number of staff on site at any given time? Consider allowing staff who use public transport to travel to work at non-peak times when there are less people around
- Can staff working times be staggered to limit the number of staff arriving to and leaving from the property at any given time?
- Consider separate entry and exit points to avoid staff bumping into each other when arriving at or leaving work
- Can the workplace be adapted to ensure that staff can continue to maintain a 2-metre distance throughout the working day?
- Where the workplace cannot be adapted can working practices be adapted to help reduce staff interaction?
- Can physical barriers be introduced to provide protection to staff?
- Limit the number of people who are able to enter smaller spaces within your premises (e.g. lifts, stockrooms, copying rooms, toilets, kitchens etc.). Consider whether it would be appropriate to close off spaces which are too small to accommodate social distancing measures (e.g. small meeting rooms)
- Could a one-way system be introduced within the property to limit the chance of staff having to pass each other in corridors or the like?

Considerations for the use of personal protective equipment (PPE)

- Could PPE be introduced to help protect staff, i.e. appropriate gloves and face masks?
- Where PPE is introduced you must ensure that staff are shown how to wear it, how to safely put it on and take it off and you should provide a suitable container for its safe disposal, clearly labelled that it contains potentially contaminated items.
- Consider regular rest breaks for staff wearing additional PPE and consider the temperature in their working environment
- Do you have a supply of approved hand sanitiser within high touch point areas and bathrooms – please remember that these gels are alcohol based so when storing them in bulk also consider the fire hazards associated with them
- Ensure that there is a continuous supply of soap within toilet areas and remind staff of how to effectively wash their hands including hand washing techniques and the time they should take to undertake this task (Sing through Happy Birthday twice to ensure you take the appropriate time)
- Arrange for more regular cleaning of toilets and high touch point areas (including door handles) and or provide alcohol based wipes to allow staff to wipe down these areas prior to use

Considerations for health and safety protocols

Ensure that your health & safety documentation is fully updated to reflect the arrangements you have put in place including, but not limited to your risk assessments, method statements and safe working practices.

Ensure that all reporting procedures are suitably updated to reflect the HSE's changes to RIDDOR ((Reporting of Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations). *NB: RIDDOR is quite interesting as it seems that you only have to report COVID-19 if it was clearly contracted whilst in the workplace, clearly it would be difficult to prove or disprove that. The example they provide is somebody working on the disease and breaking a vial allowing it to contaminate somebody. However, they also make the point that there is a need to report in the event of a death from COVID-19).*

Arrange for staff to receive adequate training and guidance in relation to the new working practices and ask for them to sign any documentation confirming that they fully understand the training and guidance they have been given and that they are fit and well. It maybe that thermography has a role to play at the point of work entry / exit. This could be on a tiered basis. For example:

- Thermal thermometer for individual staff to self-use with wipes, etc. to keep the equipment sterile
- Use of PPE protected security or receptionist to take staff temperatures in a manner as above
- Use of thermal imaging cameras which automatically highlight temperatures above a pre-determined limit

Considerations for managing staffing levels and return to work

- Introduce back to work arrangements for those who have had the illness, or a member of their family has the illness, including lighter duties for those who have been more severely affected
- Ensure that you are up to date as far as the HSE requirements are concerned in relation to RIDDOR (Reporting of Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations)
- Have you identified any vulnerable staff within your organisation who may be more at risk to COVID-19 or those who are carrying for a vulnerable person at home? What precautions have you put in place to protect them?
- Introduce a medical questionnaire or extend any medical questionnaire you may already have for visitors to your site to help determine whether an individual should be allowed to visit your site.
- Consider the safety of staff in relation to deliveries and collections to and from site.
- Where you are working on reduced staffing levels either due to staff being furloughed or where numerous staff are away from work due to illness, ensure that those that continue to work are trained in all necessary tasks. Record this training on a signed receipt basis.
- Maximise the use of technology to facilitate remote contact, for example, video conferencing to facilitate remote meetings. For customer-facing organisations, consider introducing or maximising the use of self-service options and online services. Issue staff with laptops and IT support so they can work remotely wherever possible.
- Minimise the frequency of meetings and where these are necessary ensure that social distancing measures can be maintained.
- Minimise the handling of hard copy documents and where this is necessary ensure that staff thoroughly wash their hands and avoid contact with their face until their hands are clean.
- Work with your staff throughout this period and encourage them to make suggestions to the new working practices
- Continue to review your plan and take into account all updated Government advice.

Considerations for managing future outbreaks

- Staff must be encouraged to alert management if they or their immediate family (those living with them) show signs of the virus before, after or whilst at work
- Management should arrange for these staff members to be kept away from work and other employees immediately and then either throughout the incubation period or until they have been tested and received their results confirming that the test is negative
- Introduce an area for isolating individuals who are showing symptoms whilst at work (and which has enough equipment such as thermometers, PPE etc) and ensure that this is fully cleaned after each use
- Arrange for staff to sign up to the trace and contact app which the government are looking to introduce