HM Government

Results summary of COVID-19 Risk Assessment for Civil Service Departments

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Introduction

On 11 May 2020 the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) published guidance to help employers, employees and the self-employed understand how to work safely during the COVID-19 pandemic. The guidance instructs all employers to carry out a COVID-19 risk assessment and consult with the health and safety representative selected by a recognised trade union, or, if there is not one, a representative chosen by workers. That guidance has subsequently been updated.

This document sets out the summary of the results of the COVID-19 risk assessments for Civil Service Departments, to support their employees who are working in, and will be returning to, their normal working environment. It highlights examples of the measures in place to ensure Civil Service staff, visitors or contractors that need to work in HMG buildings can do so safely.

Employer and Property Risk assessments will be completed by every HMG Department for their people and buildings, in consultation with trade unions and/or employees, and Health & Safety representatives. Employer Risk Assessments will be made available by departments via their internal communication channels, ahead of staff returning to work at those locations.

The relevant BEIS guidance has been considered in the preparation of this document, to reflect the diverse nature of the Government estate. Civil Service HR and the Government Property Agency have also developed guidance to support the implementation of government guidance. This guidance is available for departments to use as they work with trade unions and employees to further develop plans to increase workplace capacity safely.

Civil Service HR has made a range of HR policy guidance and tools available to government departments. This includes tools which help identify where individuals may require additional personal mitigations beyond those which have been implemented at an organisational level. This includes:

- Guidance and tools for line managers and employees to work together to explore how individual risks from contracting COVID-19 can be minimised alongside the organisational measures in place.
- A risk indicator tool which can help flag where an individual may potentially be more susceptible to poorer outcomes should they contract COVID-19, to enable any further mitigations to be put in place.
- Guidance and advice on workplace adjustments to support those living with disabilities or conditions to enable them to return safely to the workplace where their condition or working practices would be adversely affected by COVID safety measures.
- Guidance and tools to support managers and employees in maximising the use of video and other technology to minimise the need to travel between locations for meetings and interviews for example and reduce attendance at face to face meetings maintaining social distancing.
- Guidance and advice on managing health and wellbeing for individuals and teams where there is increased anxiety or stress from concern about the virus itself, returning to the workplace or adopting new ways of working.
- Tools and advice for leaders across the Civil Service who will be thinking about the actions they need to take to support their team's wellbeing and delivery and managing, often remotely, in challenging times.

The Government Property Agency has developed the 'Return to the Office' guidance to support Departments and their planning teams in addressing the HM Government guidance to business and employers for the government office portfolio. The guidance provides advice on relevant measures and adjustments that need to have been considered before increasing the number of employees using the office portfolio, to enable compliance with Government guidance on managing the risk of COVID-19.

1. Thinking about and managing risk

This document reflects the BEIS guidance 'Working safely during coronavirus (COVID-19)' and the Health and Safety Executive risk assessment good practice guidelines. The document has been informed by departmental risk assessments, which have been completed in consultation with Departmental Trade Union representatives; and informed by the COVID-19 risk assessments undertaken by the facilities management contractors and landlords, who provide services to the government estates portfolio, to ensure all appropriate control measures are in place. The results are also available to all staff.

The departmental employer risk assessments will be reviewed and updated when necessary, to ensure they remain effective, particularly as public health guidance on controlling the spread of COVID-19 changes.

The following 'Staying COVID-19 Secure in 2020' notice will be signed and displayed in HMG buildings to show that departments have followed the guidance.

1.1. Identified hazards and risks

The hazard identified and addressed in this document is COVID-19.

The following are some of the risks associated with this hazard that have been identified through the risk assessment process. These risks are applicable to Civil Service staff, visitors and contractors resulting from the pandemic.

- Risk of contracting and passing on COVID-19 infection
- Risk of infection to groups who are at potentially higher risk should they contract COVID-19
- Risk of infection during travel to and from the workplace
- Risk of infection from shared workplace premises
- Risk of infection from using workspaces and workstations
- Risk of infection due to a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19 in the workplace
- Risk of injury from accidents, incidents and security incidents
- Risk of infection from handling incoming and outgoing goods

The remainder of this document identifies examples of key measures in place to control these risks and ensure that any Civil Service staff, visitors or contractors that need to work in HMG buildings can do so safely.

2. Who should attend the workplace

This section addresses three of the risks identified:

- Risk of contracting and passing on COVID-19 infection
- Risk of infection to groups who are at potentially higher risk should they contract COVID-19
- Risk of mental health and wellbeing impacts

The expectation for all civil servants is that they should be conducting their work in line with the latest government safer workplace guidance. From 1 August 2020 this may mean working from home, or within the workplace if COVID-19 secure guidelines are followed closely. Civil Service departments should consult with employees on how they can work safely and ensure that workplaces are COVID-19 secure to manage the risks of transmission in line with the guidelines.

There will be some staff who will need to return to the workplace, but the number of people in the workplace will initially remain low compared to our normal capacity numbers. In line with the [Working Safely during Coronavirus guidance and](#) departmental preparations for a phased return to work, those returning will be those teams and/or individuals identified as benefiting most from an imminent return to the workplace; those who are unable to undertake their role or specific tasks required of their role; or those who are unable to work from home due to their home and/or personal circumstances, for example unsuitable environment, security, wellbeing or risk of domestic abuse.

The Civil Service supports the ability of all our staff to work as safely as possible, whether remotely or in the workplace. During the first phase of our gradual return to our normal workplace, managers should be having conversations with their staff about any potential return to the workplace. Staff who wish to return to the workplace due to home and/or personal circumstances should speak to their managers and obtain management approval for their return. In addition an individual risk indicator can be used by line managers and staff in business areas that are preparing to return to workplaces and for staff already in the workplace, to identify any factors which means an individual may be potentially more vulnerable to the effects of COVID-19, and to consider options for mitigating these.

All staff requiring reasonable adjustments for any protected characteristic are considered under the Equality Act and are, in any case, entitled to a specific risk assessment to identify reasonable adjustments they may need. We take our duty of care as an employer incredibly seriously and we want to protect all our people, especially those who may be more vulnerable as we learn more about the nature of the disease.

Individuals must not come into the workplace if they have symptoms of coronavirus, however mild, and should follow the government's '[Stay at Home](#)' guidance. Anyone who is advised to self-isolate as part of the government's [Test and Trace service](#) should also not return to the workplace until they are no longer self-isolating.

The Civil Service supports the mental health and wellbeing of all our staff. Managers are encouraged to check in regularly with their teams and all staff are advised to contact their manager / the Health Safety and Wellbeing teams in the first instance to discuss any anxieties or other wellbeing concerns which they may have. Departments have trained Mental Health First Aiders, and civil servants also have 24/7 access to employee assistance provision, via their own departmental arrangements, to discuss issues or concerns.

Some Civil Service departments have commissioned regular pulse surveys on safety and wellbeing. This helps understand emerging areas of concern to support the wellbeing of employees.

3. Social distancing at work

This section addresses the following identified risks:

- Risk of contracting and passing on COVID-19 infection
- Risk of infection during travel to and from work
- Risk of infection from shared workplace premises
- Risk of infection from using workspaces and workstations
- Risk of injury from accidents, incidents and security incidents

Measures have been put in place to ensure social distancing guidelines are maintained (2m, or 1m with risk mitigation where 2m is not viable, is acceptable). This includes while arriving at and departing from the building and whilst working and moving around the building.

Anyone coming to buildings will be expected to follow the latest safer travel guidance for passengers. Where available, onsite cycle storage and parking for cars and motorcycles is provided.

To control the flow of people in buildings, staff will be encouraged, where possible, to stagger their arrival and departure times to reduce crowding at entrances and exits.

Examples of further measures taken include:

- Buildings that have been marked with one-way systems, where possible
- Guidance signage on maintaining social distancing
- Reduced capacity in the lifts and in other communal service areas, such as bathrooms, kitchens and restaurant area
- Signs and floor markings reminding individuals of the required social distancing and hygiene standards installed throughout buildings
- Supplies of hand sanitiser made available throughout buildings
- Cleaning equipment, for example disinfectant wipes, provided close to each work area, and staff are encouraged to wipe down their workstation regularly, including before and after use, in addition to the regular cleaning that takes place, outlined in section 5.
- Non-essential areas in buildings have been closed, including catering facilities (other than some take away facilities), gyms and sports centres. Communal seating areas have clear signage regarding social distancing requirements.
- Shared communal areas including bathrooms, shower blocks and locker rooms designated for use have maximum occupancy clearly identified.
- Signs in place where shared equipment is used, such as printers and kitchen areas, reminding staff to use the cleaning products provided to wipe them down before and after use.
- Taking revolving doors out of commission where alternatives are available, reducing the frequency of touch points and assisting with social distancing.

During the earlier phases of our return to the workplace, workstations should be assigned to an individual and not shared wherever possible. If they need to be shared they should be shared by the smallest possible number of people. Managing occupancy levels to enable social distancing measures is critical to workstation planning.

Most meetings will take place virtually but where in-person meetings are essential, they will be carried out in designated meeting rooms, where social distancing guidelines are maintained (2m, or 1m with risk mitigation where 2m is not viable, is acceptable).

All building security and emergency evacuation procedures reviewed to ensure they remain appropriate. In the case of an emergency, staff are not expected to stay 2 metres apart.

Should an individual become unwell with symptoms of COVID-19 whilst in the workplace it should be reported immediately to their line manager and a first aider, and they should isolate themselves within the building until they are able to travel home safely. Once home, they should follow the government's 'Stay at Home' guidance and any advice from the government's Test and Trace service if appropriate. Information on how areas of the workplace will be cleaned in these circumstances is outlined in section 5.

First aiders, including security staff, and evacuation buddies where appropriate, are provided with personal protective equipment (gloves and face masks) where appropriate, including for use by the person receiving care. First aiders are reminded of the need to pay particular attention to hygiene measures.

4. Managing visitors and contractors

This section addresses the following identified risk:

- Risk of contracting and passing on COVID-19 infection

As the majority of meetings can be carried out virtually, visitors to Government buildings will be by exception and only by prior arrangement; where appropriate, separate arrangements should be made for customer-facing departments.

Where there is an essential need for visitors, they will be hosted in designated meeting rooms, with social distancing in place. Visitors will receive advice ahead of their arrival setting out the arrangements within the building and expectations of individuals, which they will need to confirm they have read and understood.

Where practicable, plastic screens have been installed with other social distancing measures and signage in reception areas, where visitors (and staff) are received and registered, to ensure the safety and protection of everyone.

Any contractor staff working in the building will be made aware of our operating protocols as well as any specific measures put in place by their employer.

5. Cleaning the workplace

This section addresses the following identified risks:

- Risk of infection from shared workplace premises
- Risk of infection from using workspaces and workstations
- Risk of infection due to a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19 in the workplace

Before wider reoccupation of the workplace, all building systems have been checked, cleaning has taken place and hand sanitiser has been provided.

Signage has been installed to provide reminders to maintain personal hygiene standards, including good handwashing technique and the need to increase handwashing frequency.

Departments have been operating a regime of frequent cleaning of common touch points throughout the day as a preventative measure and this will continue. This includes communal areas, toilets, showers, tea points, door handles (including fridges), light switches, handrails, security gates, lift buttons etc.

After a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19, potentially infected areas will be isolated. Cleaning will take place in line with departments' risk assessment controls which will conform to Public Health England guidance.

6. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and face coverings

This section addresses the following identified risk:

- Risk of contracting and passing on COVID-19 infection

The risks of COVID-19 in departments are managed through social distancing, hygiene, and fixed team rotas where appropriate. In line with the Working Safely During Coronavirus guidance the use of PPE is not encouraged beyond that which individuals would normally use for their work, with the exception of first aiders (outlined in section 3).

The wearing of face coverings is optional and is not required in Civil Service workplaces. However, we recognise some individuals may prefer to wear one and will support them in doing so. Labelled bins will be made available for individuals to safely dispose of any disposable face coverings (washable face coverings are encouraged).

Individuals will be reminded of good practice advice regarding face coverings such as washing their hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or using hand sanitiser before putting a face covering on, and after removing it; avoiding touching their face or face covering whilst wearing it; changing the face covering if it becomes damp, or if they have touched it, and continuing to practise social distancing wherever possible.

7. Workforce management

This section addresses the following identified risks:

- Risk of infection from shared workplace premises
- Risk of infection from using workspaces and workstations
- Risk of infection during travel to and from work

As far as possible, where staff are split into teams or shift groups, fixing these teams or shift groups so that, where contact is unavoidable, this happens between the same people.

Examples of further measures taken include:

- Where possible and relevant, those now attending the workplace more regularly may be organised into distinct groups to reduce the number of contacts each individual has and ensuring that where contact is unavoidable it happens between the same people, wherever possible.

- Where individuals are returning to the workplace less regularly (e.g. for a short period to undertake a specific task) they will be given clear guidance as to which areas of a building are open for use.
- Where possible and relevant, shift patterns are in place and desking booking systems which require staff to book access to the workplace in advance

Work-related travel has been minimised as much as possible. Where work-related travel is essential, staff will need to comply with departmental requirements on completing risk assessments before carrying out their journey. Department staff are given guidance on the safety arrangements they need to follow to protect themselves and others whilst travelling.

If there is an unavoidable need for an overnight stay, accommodation should be booked through departmental travel management systems, where it is centrally logged and only accommodation that meets social distancing guidelines is used.

Full communications and engagement plans for the return to the workplace for employees will be available. Staff will receive regular updates through a variety of digital channels (emails, intranet, virtual meetings) and physical channels (signs and posters in buildings).

8. Inbound and outbound goods

This section addresses the following identified risk:

- Risk of infection from handling incoming and outgoing goods

Identifying areas where people directly pass things to each other, for example office supplies, and finding ways to remove direct contact, such as using drop-off points or transfer zones.

To minimise deliveries, only essential supplies should be accepted to departments. Social distancing protocols are in place for delivery and pick-up.