



HM Courts &
Tribunals Service

HMCTS Organisational COVID-19 Risk assesment

February 2021



HMCTS Organisational COVID-19

Risk Assessment

After detailed work across our agency, which has been and will be updated regularly, we have identified the COVID-19 related risks in our workplaces and put in place measures to mitigate and control those risks. Our arrangements are kept under constant review to ensure that they continually reflect changing circumstances, as well as current public health advice. We work with our Departmental Trades Unions and other organisations who use our Courts and Tribunals, sharing with them our approach on Risk Assessment and Risk Management. The table below gives an overview of our assessment of risks across the organisation and details the safety measures in place.

This represents the latest iteration of our organisational risk assessment. It is released on the back of the developments through December 2020 and January 2021, as further detail of new variants of Covid-19 has emerged and the understanding of these has increased. This Assessment has been refreshed in light of these developments and in agreement with Public Health England.

We constantly monitor the arrangements in all our buildings to ensure that they continue to meet the standards required. In doing this, we adopt a structured approach, using a local [Assessment Tool](#). Across HMCTS we have a range of workplaces with differing requirements and the local assessment tool provides a flexible framework for managers to effectively assess the risks and manage the safety measures for individual buildings, working with trades union colleagues and local teams. The tool helps to ensure that potential risks are constantly monitored, that swift action can be taken where necessary, and that anything significant that can't be resolved quickly at local level is escalated promptly.



We keep this tool updated to reflect any changes in guidance and any feedback from external stakeholders and trades unions. We also have a framework of detailed guidance behind the tool, allowing HMCTS staff to manage risks in a suitable and sufficient manner, as proportionately and effectively as possible. That guidance is available to all members of staff and members of the judiciary via our secure intranet, and a summary of it is available (to the extent useful and relevant) for our users via the internet (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/keeping-court-and-tribunal-buildings-safe-secure-and-clean>).



The guidance is overseen and kept under regular review by a governance committee established specifically for this purpose, chaired by an Executive Director and constituted by health & safety professionals, operational leaders, HR colleagues, property specialists and other key officials from across the organisation. All actions contained in this document are reviewed on an ongoing basis.

We aim to assure compliance with the standards set out in a number of ways, including through management-level checks that local assessment tools have been completed and are being regularly reviewed appropriately; arranging audits through our national Governance & Assurance Division to monitor adherence and report back to senior governance forums; and engaging H&S professionals from other government departments as an external/independent check on compliance. Further, we engage with public health agencies to ensure our processes, policies and supporting guidance do meet required standards.

We constantly review our arrangements to ensure that we have put the right mitigations in place to control the transmission of COVID-19 e.g. in addition to providing all our sites with touchpoint cleaner/s, we have also introduced specialist cleans of all or part of the building, in the event of a confirmed or suspected case of coronavirus, in line with the Government guidelines.

The changes we have made to our sites are far reaching and the potential Equality Act (EA) impacts of our mitigations on disabled people particularly those with hearing and visual impairments, limited mobility, wheelchair users, larger people who need bariatric (oversize seating) and people with mental health conditions, are clear. Where EA issues are identified, we have mechanisms and processes in place to consider the impact of changes as part of the approval process.

If you are worried about anything, or feel that something is not in place that should be, please ask to speak to the court or tribunal manager or contact HMCTSHandSHUB@justice.gov.uk or HMCTS.COVID-19ResponseTeam@justice.gov.uk.

HMCTS colleagues should speak to their line manager, the Senior Person on Site (SPOS), or their Regional Safety and Security Officer (RSSO) in the first instance.

What are the hazards?

Contraction of COVID-19 through contact with surfaces

Risk to staff and all court/tribunal users

What have we already done to control the risks?

- Introduced more than 650 additional cleaners into court and tribunal buildings, that are open to the public, to carry out additional touchpoint cleans throughout the day, with extra attention to areas likely to be touched frequently by multiple people (e.g. door handles, switches, lift buttons, hand rails, push plates hearing loop equipment, Perspex screens etc.). Cleaners have also been instructed to pay extra attention to hand-washing basins, shower rooms and other wet room facilities (e.g. Prayer Rooms, First Aid Rooms).
- Introduced extra checks around soap and hand drying facilities, ensuring priority for fixing immediately, any reported issues. Addressed all known hot water related issues and undertaken a programme of works in washrooms to improve facilities.
- Ensured every building is cleaned at night, along with regular touchpoint cleaning throughout the day, in public and admin areas.
- Introduced high visibility 'cleaning support' jackets for our daytime cleaners, so they are easy to spot.
- Provided hand sanitiser and anti-bacterial wipes to all sites, with stock available to meet future demand. Arrangements also made for employees to bring their own into courts and tribunals.
- Promoted handwashing and personal hygiene with posters in prominent places in buildings.
- Responded quickly to complaints about poor hygiene or problems that would prevent users washing their hands.

- Removed water carafes and glasses from courtrooms/hearing rooms. Shared items such as leaflets, magazines, children's toys, books, TV remotes etc. have also been removed from waiting and general areas as well as communal areas.
- Encouraged any concerns with building cleanliness or soap supplies to be referred instantly.
- Exploring and piloting other products and equipment to keep our buildings clean.

What further action do we need to take to control the risks?

Regular local monitoring and communication.

Our staff will carry out checks through the day and will close off areas within a building, or whole buildings, where standards are not as they should be, whilst they put in place measures to improve the situation.

Who needs to carry out the action?

Local Managers supported by central Facilities Management Team.

What are the hazards?

Contraction of COVID-19 through contact with other people

Risk to staff and all court/tribunal users

What have we already done to control the risks?

- If anyone tells us / shows symptoms of or has tested positive for COVID-19 in the last 10 days, or is in a period of self-isolation they will be refused entry to the building by Court/Tribunal Security Officers.
- If an individual already in a court or tribunal building shows symptoms or tells us they are symptomatic, they will immediately be given a fluid resistant mask and escorted from the building.
- We have reviewed **all non-public areas**, to promote social distancing for employees and judiciary, with measures at different sites including, but not limited to, the following:
 - Encouraging and facilitating staff working from home, where possible, limiting the personnel on site to those necessary to sustain the delivery of our public services;
 - Regular, targeted communications, through a variety of mediums, looking constantly to reinforce the importance of observing public health advice and the hierarchy of controls recommended (including but not limited to social distancing and personal hygiene), as well as flagging relevant and helpful guidance and tools that can help colleagues manage risks and keep safe;
 - Reviewing seating arrangements to enable employees to socially distance from each other when at their workstation (side-by-side or facing away from each other over face-to-face layout is preferred. Employee workstations will only face one another where there is a sufficient distance in between);
 - As far as is practicable, using one-way systems;
 - Monitoring and regulating use of toilet facilities, restricting access if necessary;

- Changing working hours where possible, if it supports individuals to travel at earlier or later times to reduce contact with other people and staggering lunch and comfort breaks;
- Introducing shift working where possible, sometimes creating temporary teams, to allow individuals to travel to/from the workplace at different times of the day and/or alternate weeks;
- Avoiding, where possible, all events that involve bringing groups of people together or moving them to become virtual events e.g. team meetings arranged on the phone (even if people are sitting apart in the same office);
- Avoiding face-to-face meetings or training wherever possible; encouraging use of Microsoft Teams, telephone conferencing or holding meetings with employees at their workstations.
- Introduced a pilot of Lateral Flow Testing at sites in Manchester Civil Justice Centre and Southwark to test all staff (HMCTS or Agency), contractors and jurors. We also encourage staff and court users to make use of local authority Lateral Flow Centres, where available.

What further action do we need to take to control the risks?

Regular local monitoring and communication.

Our staff will carry out checks through the day and will close off areas within a building, or whole buildings, where standards are not as they should be, whilst they put in place measures to improve the situation

Who needs to carry out the action?

Local managers supported by central Facilities Management Team

What are the hazards?

Contraction of COVID-19

Risk to staff and all court/tribunal users

What have we already done to control the risks?

- **Social distancing** is regularly assessed in public areas. 2m social distancing is the default minimum standard. Where 2m social distancing is not possible, 1m+ with mitigation social distancing within common public areas of the building, including public waiting areas may be considered, but only where it is safe to do so, and it must be in line with current guidance.
- If unable to maintain 2m distance after considering all mitigation options, consider moving to 1m + mitigation. If there is space, installing clear screens to the appropriate specification, as set out in the [Guidance on Screens](#) (Regional Facilities Managers can arrange this if appropriate).
- We have reviewed all public areas, including every open or staffed Court/Tribunal, putting in place arrangements to help people maintain a 2m or 1m+ mitigation distance where appropriate. These will vary for different buildings depending on layout, but may include:
 - Reminding Court/Tribunal users that face coverings are required in the public areas across our buildings in England and Wales (and strongly recommended in Scotland);
 - Reminding Court/Tribunal users to maintain social distancing where possible through regular announcements, posters etc;
 - Displaying social distancing and face covering posters in prominent locations;
 - Putting a system in place to manage the flow of people and to maintain a 2m or 1m+ mitigation distance e.g. using numerical labelling of seats, floor markings and tape;
 - Advising those entering or leaving courtrooms/hearing rooms, to avoid cross-traffic in the doors and restricting the number of people in the public galleries at any point in time;
 - Removing furniture or cordoning off to enable individuals to be at a physical distance of 2m or 1m+ mitigation from each other wherever possible;
 - In courtrooms/hearing rooms, marking seats as 'not for use', taping them off and leaving some rows empty;
 - For areas where queuing will occur, using floor marking tape to enable social distancing to be observed;
 - Using a one-in, one-out, system for lift entry and exit. This could include use of posters and if required, marshalling during busy times;
 - Maintaining social distancing whilst using toilet facilities, using posters to communicate required behaviours e.g. maximum occupancy, one in one out system, queue markers;
 - Marshalling in the courtroom/hearing room to ensure people are directed to take the correct seat and maintain their social distance;
 - Taping off selected seats in seating areas or clearly marking some as not for use, to ensure a 2m (default) or 1m+ mitigation (if strictly necessary) distance between those sitting in these areas;
 - Promoting personal responsibilities for social distancing through posters, tannoy announcements and other means.
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- Regularly reviewing maximum occupancy levels in public areas e.g. court rooms, consultation rooms, waiting areas etc. to ensure that social distancing is not being compromised. Displaying prominent posters clearly stating the maximum number of occupants allowed in such areas at any given time

What are the hazards?

Contraction of COVID-19

Risk to staff and all court/tribunal users

- We have reviewed **custody suites**. Prisoner Escorts and Custody Services (PECS) have primary responsibility for conducting custody suite assessments. HMCTS employees are asked to work collaboratively with PECS to agree and adhere to the safe and consistent use of the custody suite, including:
 - Ensuring facilities are in place to allow legal defence professionals to communicate remotely (by phone) with prisoners, from within the custody suite, where adequate social distancing cannot be facilitated;
 - Supporting PECS to manage custody suite visitors and dock capacity in line with the maximum numbers and safety parameters determined in their risk assessment;
 - Additional touch point cleaning in line with the wider court building;
 - Introduced individual risk assessment approach to use of restraints to reduce close contact;
 - Specific entry & exit procedures for visitors (1 visitor through entry point at a time);
 - Face coverings mandated for all custody visitors and provided for detainees who are encouraged to wear;
 - All prisoners with suspected coronavirus are managed by HMPPS in compliance
 - with PHE and PHW guidelines;
 - All custody staff are now required to wear PPE (fluid resistant surgical masks (FRSMs) masks), whilst in the custody suite, at all times with a few minor exceptions (e.g. if their rest room is sufficient in size to enable adequate social distancing);
 - Custody staff are mandated to wear PPE (FRSMs) whilst in the dock within the court room, unless specifically directed otherwise by the Judge;
- We have reviewed the **security search** procedures and introduced a 'hands off' bag check and requested that court/tribunal users do not bring prohibited items into HMCTS buildings (<https://www.gov.uk/entering-court-or-tribunalbuilding>) to limit the need for a close contact security search of court/tribunal users at the public entrances:
 - Using walk-through detectors wherever possible to detect such items, and therefore reducing as far as possible, the use of hand held 'search detectors' at the public entrance of buildings;
 - Using protective gloves if an item needs to be touched by the security officer and using hand sanitiser to maintain hygiene. This is delivered in line with published guidance and endorsed by Public Health England/Wales; <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/keeping-court-and-tribunal-buildings-safesecure-and-clean#use-of-hand-held-detectors>.
 - Asking court/tribunal users to remove their belts before passing through the security arch therefore reducing, as far as possible, the use of hand held 'search detectors';
 - If wandling needs to be carried out court/tribunal users will be asked to turn away from the security office so that they are not face-to-face at any point during the search.
- We have reviewed the **face covering** requirements within the court/tribunal buildings:
 - HMCTS has taken the decision to require face coverings to be worn by all court/tribunal users and HMCTS employees, in all public areas of Court and Tribunal buildings in England and Wales, in line with government guidance, to increase confidence amongst users as well as to help prevent transmission of coronavirus. On the 21st January 2021, this was extended to cover all staff including agency staff in non-public areas who, unless exempt, must wear a face covering unless seated at a workstation;

What are the hazards?

Contraction of COVID-19

Risk to staff and all court/tribunal users

- HMCTS will provide face coverings to frontline colleagues in public facing roles where required.
 - Face coverings are now required unless an individual is exempt from wearing one. Exemption cards are available online at gov.uk and will also be provided at our entrances where required;
 - Care must be taken when communicating with a person who is exempt to ensure their safety and dignity and to comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty. 2m social distancing should be applied at all times in these cases and, if necessary, the individual must be taken to an area where the 2m social distancing is achievable in order to communicate safely. This also applies if employees have to remove their own face covering to communicate with someone who needs to lip read;
 - HMCTS employees and Court/Tribunal users may wear their own face coverings if they wish, provided it is consistent with Public Health guidance;
 - Court/tribunal users and professionals will be provided with a single use face covering on request at the entrance, but the likelihood is that they will provide their own;
 - Staff are able to remove face coverings when seated at a workstation. When removing face coverings the following guidance needs to be observed:
 - » Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser before putting a face covering on, and after removing it.
 - » When wearing a face covering, avoid touching your face or the face covering, as you could contaminate it with germs from your hands.
 - » After wearing a reusable face covering, it should be placed inside a plastic bag prior to it being washed to prevent onwards contamination from the used face covering. It should not be placed on a desk or other work surface which it could contaminate or be contaminated by.
 - Single-use face coverings should be disposed of carefully in a disposable no touch bin. Users should immediately wash their hands with soap and water or use a hand sanitiser.
 - [Face coverings Q&A](#) and [HMCTS SSOP 41 Enforcing court/tribunal users wearing face coverings whilst in common public areas of the building](#) have been updated to provide clarity on use of face coverings.
 - All individuals should wear face coverings (unless exempt) in areas which have been assessed locally to be too narrow for 2m socially distancing to be applied. These areas should be clearly marked to ensure face coverings are worn.
- We have reviewed the **Jury Deliberation Rooms** and introduced the use of screens where 2m social distancing is not possible to reduce the risk of transmission of the virus. In January 2021, under the guidance of public health organisations we bolstered our mitigations in these rooms, requiring jurors to wear a fluid resistant surgical mask (unless exempt) where 2m social distancing cannot be observed. The wearing of visors is not permitted in these rooms.
 - We have introduced the **NHS QR codes** into court/tribunal buildings, to support NHS Test and Trace and NHS Wales Test, Trace, Protect Policy. Whilst this is a voluntary requirement, we encourage everyone using public and communal areas of court/tribunal buildings to scan the NHS QR codes if they are using the NHS COVID-19 app.

What are the hazards?

Contraction of COVID-19

Risk to staff and all court/tribunal users

(When people have contact tracing switched on, the NHS app will use Bluetooth to know when it has come into close contact with other nearby app users. If any of those nearby app users later test positive for coronavirus (COVID-19), others who came into close contact may receive an alert with advice on what to do – this could include advising people to self-isolate and book a test if they develop symptoms.)

The NHS guidance is clear that people should pause contact tracing in the app when they are working behind a fixed Perspex (or equivalent) screen or store their phone in a locker or communal area. This is important as Plexiglass Screens are now a mitigation used in many of our buildings, courtrooms and deliberation rooms.)

The face of justice/

“We’re working safely to keep our courts and tribunals running”
Sarah, Operations Manager,
Portsmouth Combined Court

HM Courts & Tribunals Service

Keeping our buildings safe, secure and clean

HM Courts & Tribunals Service

Make space for justice/

“We’re working safely to keep our courts and tribunals running”
Nat, Crown Court Clerk,
Portsmouth Law Courts

Justice matters

Keeping our buildings safe, secure and clean

HM Courts & Tribunals Service

The hands of justice/

“We’re working safely to keep our courts and tribunals running”
Suji, Admin Member,
Portsmouth Law Courts

Justice matters

Keeping our buildings safe, secure and clean

HMCTS 2021 COVID-19 safety campaign posters, featuring HMCTS court staff.

What are the hazards?

Wellbeing

Risk to staff

What have we already done to control the risks?

- Promoting **positive wellbeing** of staff during these challenging times is critical and interventions include, but are not limited to:
 - Providing support through resources such as the Employee Assistance Programme, the Mental Health Allies Network, various other tools and guidance including free access to a meditation app;
 - [HMCTS HR intranet pages](#) including specific updated guidance on topics such as returning to work conversations, keeping in touch and temporary working patterns;
 - Continuation of a regular employee newsletter to help colleagues combat feelings of isolation and loneliness, and help people adapt to new ways of working;
 - Creation of additional online learning;
 - Useful guidance has been published on our [Health and Wellbeing](#) pages on the intranet, as well as some hints and tips and simple ideas on a range of topics shared by colleagues to support individuals during these difficult times to look after themselves and others;
 - [Our People Promise Support Wheel](#) has been made available to help individuals identify and access the support needed most at this time. The range of support is continuously growing based on colleagues' feedback, and our changing needs at the COVID-19 outbreak develops and we move through the different stages. The tool will be continuously updated to reflect this;
 - Access to Work scheme has been revised to extend help available to disabled employees who are working from home or needing to return to the office but requiring support to do so;

- Introduction of the COVID-19 Individual Risk Indicator (CIRI) tool to take into account individual personal factors that impact on returning to the workplace. Employees can use the tool in conversation with their line manager to discuss any additional requirements to be put in place to support the individual's return;
- Regular webinars held by senior management team to provide updated information and address any concerns;
- Dedicated Central COVID Response Team established to support and advise local management on staff communications.

What further action do we need to take to control the risks?

Continual monitoring of guidance, updating as required, including using results from the annual People Survey in November to update on any activities.

Who needs to carry out the action?

HR, Property, Health & Safety and Operations.

What are the hazards?

Wellbeing

Court/Tribunal users.

What have we already done to control the risks?

- Positive promotion of the safety measures in place to reassure and reduce anxiety. Measures to reduce the anxiety of other court/tribunal users include:
 - Clear signage to reassure that safety measures are in place;
 - Provision of disposable face coverings on request;
 - Provision of Exemption cards where applicable;
 - Regular [tannoy announcements](#), issuing useful reminders;
 - Publication of our processes and arrangements, along with channels through which to raise any concerns;
 - Reassurance provided by HMCTS colleagues;
 - A Central team to support local courts and tribunals in managing incidents.

What further action do we need to take to control the risks?

Regular monitoring and communications

Who needs to carry out the action?

Local managers supported by central Facilities Management Team



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the **H&S Hub** click [here](#)



HM Courts &
Tribunals Service

