

Summary: Communicating behaviours to reduce transmissions between social networks

Communicate two key principles:

1. People whose work involves large numbers of contacts with different people should avoid close, prolonged, indoor contact with anyone as far as possible.

People in these roles (e.g. serving the public, providing support across a large organisation) need to take extra care to reduce their risk of catching and spreading infection, by handwashing, avoiding touching surfaces and cleaning any surfaces they touch, wearing a mask when close to others.

Where feasible, working 4 days with contact/10 days without contact (e.g. home working, working alone, not working) will minimise risk of spreading any asymptomatic infection caught during the 4 days working with contact, since this will become non-infectious to others by the end of the 10 day period without contact.

2. People with different workplace networks should avoid meeting or sharing the same spaces.

For example, people who share an office should avoid meeting or sharing spaces (e.g. kitchens, toilets) with people who share a different office, and contact should be avoided between teachers and pupils from different classes.

Note that all the steps below need to be taken in order to communicate these principles effectively:

Carry out an extensive education campaign for employers, employees, self-employed people and the general public, working with multidisciplinary experts in supporting workplace behaviour change to provide toolkits with clear explanations, detailed guidance and effective behaviour change techniques

Co-create guidance and solutions with input from diverse members of the target user groups (both organisational leads and employees) to identify opportunities, concerns, barriers and solutions, and create a shared sense of responsibility

Redesign shared activities and spaces to minimise contacts, for example, by adopting new shift patterns or patterns of workspace use, restricting access to communal spaces or allocating spaces to particular groups at particular times with ventilation and cleaning between use

Use existing organisational structures and processes for implementation, for example Health and Safety regulations and enforcement processes, including personal and workplace risk assessments to identify, apply and monitor appropriate methods of reducing infection spread

Monitor and feedback to all concerned to check and reassure that infection control is being implemented effectively

SPI-B recommendations for communicating behaviours to reduce transmission in occupations with high levels of social connectivity

Previous health promotion campaigns have successfully raised awareness that infection transmission can be reduced by hand and surface hygiene and maintaining 2 metres distance from others. There is less awareness and understanding by the general public of how transmission can be reduced by limiting the size and connectivity of social networks, particularly in occupational settings. Conveying the transmission risk whilst providing clear and simple guidance on how it can be mitigated by an individual's actions is critical in successfully embedding behaviour change. Future health campaigns could therefore usefully promote awareness of the risk created by wide transmission through social networks combined with the following key principles for how individual's actions (facilitated by organisation processes and policies) can help reduce transmission between social networks:

Minimise the number, proximity and duration of contacts (especially indoors) between people who have contact with multiple networks or groups (especially if these are large networks).

Some occupational roles require higher levels of face-to-face contact with networks or groups of people, such as clients, customers, and staff. People with contact with different groups of people should avoid meeting or using the same spaces as far as possible (e.g. toilets, dining rooms, entrances). When it is impossible to avoid meeting or sharing spaces, particularly strict attention to social distancing and hygiene measures will be required (for example, no less than 2 metres distancing at all times, frequent cleaning of surfaces, mask wearing, ventilation).

Where feasible, working 4 days with contact/10 days without contact (e.g. home working, not working, working alone) will minimise risk of spreading any asymptomatic infection caught during the 4 days working, since this will become non-infectious to others by the end of the 10-day no contact period.

Selected illustrations:

People who come into contact with a high volume of people (i.e. many contacts with clients/customers at work, even if these are brief – for example, bus drivers) have a higher risk of infection and transmission. People whose work involves close, prolonged contact with many different people (e.g. hairdressers, care home workers) or going into multiple homes (e.g. cleaners, plumbers) also have a higher risk of infection and transmission. These people need to be especially careful to avoid spreading infection inside and outside the workplace, in the community and at home.

As far as possible, people in these roles should avoid making contact with each other and with people in the workplace in roles requiring lower levels of contact. For example:

- teachers have contact with many children in their class and so should avoid meeting or using the same spaces as staff who do not have contact with children
- delivery drivers have contact with many households and so should avoid meeting or sharing spaces with people packing deliveries, who do not
- train conductors have contact with many passengers and so should avoid meeting or using the same spaces as conductors on different trains (as they have contact with different sets of passengers), or train drivers (as they do not have contact with passengers)

People with different workplace networks should avoid meeting or sharing the same spaces, to reduce transmission between the networks (even if the networks are not large). This means that in workplaces without public facing contact but where workers need to come to work and interact with each other (e.g. factories, offices) people should form teams and as far as possible only have contact with people in those teams.

For example:

- people who share an office (which is a group/network of workers) should avoid meeting or sharing space with people who share a different office (which is a different group/network of workers)
- people who make contact with clients or customers from a particular area (e.g. of the city or country) or a particular group (e.g. an organisation or client group) should avoid meeting or sharing spaces with people who work with clients or customers from a different area or group
- contact should be avoided between people who work on different shifts or days (since people working the same shift or day form a network)
- contact should be avoided between teachers and pupils from different classes, since a teacher and their class is a small network

Note that people providing supervision (e.g. management) or support (e.g. IT, maintenance, catering) to many different colleagues in an organisation have potential to spread infection across groups/networks and so also need to pay particular attention to social distancing, hygiene and wearing face-coverings if appropriate.

Barriers and facilitators to enable these behaviours

The principles previously articulated by SPI-B for providing guidance^{1,2,3} are relevant to successfully communicating, implementing and regulating these behaviours. These principles are well aligned with the theoretical framework used to inform CPNI's COVID-19 Workplace Actions messaging campaign⁴ which aims to help organisations successfully embed good health behaviours in the workplace in line with UK Government guidelines.

Provide a credible rationale and precise and detailed guidance

In order to implement social network controls effectively everyone in the organisation must understand how this will reduce transmission, why this is important, and exactly what they need to do to help reduce transmission between networks. This will comprise two key audiences: individual employees at all levels, so they can readily identify and apply the principles in their day-to-day work and organisations/business leaders who will need to design and implement practices, processes and policies to facilitate and manage social network controls. In addition, self-employed people and their customers (i.e. the general public) also need to understand and apply the principles of social network control.

These principles cannot be conveyed by simple, short messages and will require an extensive campaign with clear, consistent, detailed, mutuality based messaging linked to effective behaviour change techniques (such as goal setting and self-monitoring). Leadership teams will need to both understand how to apply these principles within their organisations themselves via their own practices and policies and how to effectively support the right behaviours in their employees via an internal awareness communication campaign. Supporting organisations by providing a 'how to'

guide along with step-by-step guidance on how to run an internal awareness campaign with easily adaptable materials designed for this purpose should increase uptake and success³. Guidance and supporting materials should be developed with input from diverse members of the target user groups (organisational leads, unions, employees, self-employed people and members of the public) to ensure it is comprehensible and memorable, and is viewed as feasible and beneficial. Care should be taken to ensure any guidance promotes a measured amount of concern about the risk of transmission in social networks but also provides clear and actionable advice for the target groups that is further enabled by the organisation in a co-ordinated fashion in line with the principles outlined herein.

Co-create solutions

Members of the workforce can help identify opportunities, challenges and solutions for controlling transmission across networks and should be involved in planning from an early stage. Engaging with all members of the workforce and members of the public who will be affected by changes will help understand their perspectives and address their concerns prior to making changes. If separation between networks requires minimising contacts between members of the workforce it will be important to plan with them how to maintain social cohesion and support. Co-creation can also create a sense of shared responsibility and facilitate a clear understanding of the combined power of organisational and individual contributions to a COVID-safe environment. Public health messages around promoting a sense of shared responsibility have been shown to more effective than those promoting self-interest⁵.

Redesign shared activities and spaces to enable changes

Minimising connections between networks will be achieved most effectively by re-allocation of activities and spaces to prevent mixing of networks. For example, this may involve members of the organisation adopting new shift patterns or patterns of office use. It may be necessary to remove or restrict access to some communal spaces (e.g. staff or waiting rooms) or allocate spaces to particular groups at particular times (e.g. entrances, hallways, offices or meeting rooms), with ventilation and cleaning between use by different networks where possible. Where shared use is unavoidable, screens and barriers (including face coverings) may help to prevent droplet transmission and ensure distancing. In order to promote adherence and limit disillusionment with changes to the work environment it must be clear why these specific changes have been adopted, and this explanation should be consistent with the overall rationale for limiting transmission as outlined in the guidance. Consideration must be given to the viability of adapted shift patterns and office use on different groups including those with caring responsibilities or medical impairments.

Harness organisational structures and processes

Health and Safety regulations and enforcement processes can be harnessed to achieve better infection control across social networks in workplace settings. This involves using personal and workplace risk assessments to evaluate transmission risks to everyone in the workplace and then identify, implement and monitor appropriate methods of reducing these (e.g. staggered shifts/alternating work days to avoid mixing networks at work and when travelling to work). This strategy can be implemented through employers and trade unions, reinforced by helplines to enable employers and employees to report any problems and seek advice and help for better implementation. The processes involved in reporting, investigating, and addressing concerns must be communicated clearly, and assessed in terms of benefits and effectiveness⁶.

Monitoring and providing feedback

Monitoring behaviour and infection rates and informing all concerned is important in order to provide transparent and convincing feedback about how infection control is being implemented and how effective it is; this will inform and encourage better implementation and adherence as well as providing reassurance that risk of transmission is being monitored and minimised.

Proposed next steps

To deliver this into operational practice we recommend the production of four key products by a multidisciplinary team:

- Awareness campaign at a business-level for organisations as to why their role in helping implement social network controls is essential part of UK effort to ‘control the virus’
- Guidance toolkit for organisations to help them consider and implement pragmatic social network controls
- Employee behaviour change campaign toolkit that can be readily used and adapted by organisations
- Awareness campaign and toolkit for general public (including self-employed workers)

The multi-disciplinary and multi-cultural team should be formed of: business/organisation experts with established links to and understanding of range of organisations and their processes/regulation (such as those within Department for Business, Energy and Innovation and the Health and Safety Executive); relevant modelling experts, occupational psychologists and behaviour change experts with experience in developing guidance and behaviour change campaigns for industry; communications experts. All guidance developed must be extensively and iteratively tested and optimised through real-world implementation and feedback.

Implementing social network controls principles effectively in the workplace may assist the public with applying these in their personal/daily lives when lockdown restrictions ease. The experience and approach gained by the multidisciplinary and multi-cultural team may also help inform the design and delivery of any wider public messaging campaign on the need for and how to enact social network control principles.

References

¹SPI-B: Behavioural principles for updating guidance to minimise population transmission (April 2020)

²Theory and evidence base for initial SPI-B recommendations for phased changes in activity restrictions (April 2020)

³Interdisciplinary Task and Finish Group on the Role of Children in Transmission: Modelling and behavioural science responses to scenarios for relaxing school closures

⁴CPNI. COVID-19 workplace actions campaign: Guidance for organisations.
<https://www.cpni.gov.uk/system/files/documents/ec/04/CV-19%20Workplace%20Actions%20Campaign%20Guidance%20v1.0.pdf>

⁵Pearce JM, Parker D, Lindekilde L, Bouhana N & Rogers BM (2019) Encouraging public reporting of suspicious behaviour on rail networks, Policing and Society, DOI: 10.1080/10439463.2019.1607340

⁶Bonell C, Michie S, Reicher S, et al. Harnessing behavioural science in public health campaigns to maintain 'social distancing' in response to the COVID-19 pandemic: key principles [published online ahead of print, 2020 May 8]. *J Epidemiol Community Health*. 2020;jech-2020-214290. doi:10.1136/jech-2020-214290