Covid-19 Self isolation, social distancing, shift patterns and who should be at work.

This guidance note gives information on the key areas of infection control. These are social distancing, the reduction in contact with people through shift management and self isolation and reducing the contact between vulnerable people and their work colleagues.

Self isolation

The NHS test and trace service will follow up with people who need to self isolate because they have been in close contact with a colleague (or other person) who has tested positive for the virus. See NHS.uk at https://bit.ly/3clFz3T. This will mean that anyone in your workplace who has been in close contact within 48 hours with a family member, friend or colleague who has tested positive. They will receive a formal notification that they need to self isolate. The period of self isolation will be 14 days from the date of most recent contact with the person who has tested positive. This notification will need to be shown to you so Statutory Sick Pay is to be arranged.

As an employer, you should request that your employees follow the self isolation notifications they receive from the NHS test and trace service. Your support should enable them to self isolate without feeling the pressure to return to work too early. Your employees will be required to self isolate if:

> They have coronavirus symptoms and they are awaiting a test result

> They have received a positive test result

> They have a member of their household or acquaintance with whom they have had close contact has developed symptoms or tested positive for Covid-19

> They have been in close contact recently with someone who has tested positive and notified to self isolate by the NHS test and trace service.

To reduce the risk of losing employees from the workplace due to self isolation, you should undertake a thorough risk assessment and act on the findings. The contents of this toolkit will help you decide on the control measures you should use. The government advice to encourage home working when possible and to introduce staggered working times and social distancing in the workplace is designed to reduce the chance of spreading the virus and this in turn will reduce the disruption caused by self isolation requirements.

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Who should be at work?

Try to keep as many people as possible working at home. This will mean stepping up the communication process and ensuring that people have the technology they need to allow effective work away from the office, whilst still maintaining a safe working environment. There will be employees who don't normally work at home who might be able to do so with some adjustment to their role. Such matters should be considered as part of your risk assessment process. Information, instruction and training on working from home should be provided.

For those people who cannot work from home, there are key vulnerable groups that need special consideration and employees that fall into these two groups should be considered specifically by your risk assessment process.

Employees who are clinically extremely vulnerable should be shielding and staying at home. These individuals will have been told that they are clinically extremely vulnerable by their GP or medical specialist. They will have medical conditions that place them at greater risk of the virus e.g. solid organ transplant recipients, people on immunosuppression therapies etc. A detailed list can be found at nhs.uk at https://bit.ly/3dRjkue.

There is another group who are clinically vulnerable and at a moderate risk of severe illness from coronavirus. This includes people with a wide range of illnesses such as kidney disease, liver disease, heart disease, diabetes, mild to moderate respiratory diseases such as asthma etc. A detailed list can be found at nhs.uk at https://bit.ly/3dRjkue. The people in this group normally receive a letter each winter instructing them to have a flu jab. These people should stay at home and work where possible and if they are back at work your risk assessment should consider how they can be isolated as far as possible from other employees and third parties. They should be provided with the roles that afford the most social distancing.

Social distancing

Maintaining social distancing in the workplace will assist in reducing the risk of virus spread. As guidelines on social distancing develop, the current best practice advice should be followed. Practical steps to take include:

> Staff car parking, leave a clear space between parked cars or reverse park so that drivers remain socially distanced.

> Consider the commute to work

> Car share schemes should be reviewed and stopped where necessary if social distancing cannot be maintained.

> Avoid congestion at cycling racks and smoking areas

> Avoid congestion at clocking in machines and takes steps to limit touch points.

> Entrance security gates. Remove the use of turnstiles to limit touch points.

> Using signage to remind employees of social distancing requirements.

> Amend site plans to show new routes around the workplace

> Arranging one way routes through the workplace and in and out of the workplace.

> Arranging for one person at a time to use a lift to gain upper floors with the stairs being used to descend to lower floors.

> Use floor tape to mark out work areas with a 2 metre distancing (or current best practice alternative)

> Separate workstations and desks and avoid sharing workstations

> Use side to side and back to back working positions rather than face to face if a 2 metre distance (or current best practice alternative) cannot be maintained

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> Consider whether barriers can be installed to segregate work stations and to separate members of the public from employees

> Ensure that visitors to the workplace have made an appointment so that a suitable venue for a meeting can be arranged

> Introduce rules to ensure that social distancing can be maintained in work canteens and kitchens. This could mean that each person takes a turn to make their own drink in the kitchen during staggered breaks. It may also mean that there is a limit to the number of people sitting at a table in the canteen. Consider whether employees can bring in their own food and even eat off site in their car.

> Review and update as necessary your Fire Risk Assessment to ensure appropriate preventative, protective and evacuation measures are maintained in your workplace.

Shift management

Staggering working times means that there are less people in the workplace to spread the virus. If possible, the start and finish times should be staggered to reduce the number of people in the workplace. This will also ensure that the workplace can be entered and left at the start and end of shifts with social distancing maximised.

If introducing night-shifts factor this into your risk assessment. Ensure levels of supervision are maintained in line with day-shifts.

If employees work together in teams, you should make arrangements for the same team to stay working together so the number of contacts any one employee makes at work is reduced to a minimum. If a team of two is needed for a work activity, the same employee partnership should be maintained whenever possible.

Ensure that appropriate numbers of First Aiders and Fire Marshalls are maintained when adopting staggered working times.

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