

National Joint Council for local government services

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To: Chief Executives in England, Wales and N Ireland
(additional copy for HR Director)
Members of the National Joint Council

16 July 2021

Dear Chief Executive,

COVID-19: working arrangements from 19 July

Please continue to visit the LGA's [Coronavirus: information for councils](#) webpage for all up to date advice.

All information contained in this circular is correct at time of publication but all links to external websites should be checked regularly as official advice is likely to be updated as the situation continues to develop.

All previous NJC circulars providing advice and guidance relating to the pandemic are [online](#).

The Government has announced that in England, from Monday 19 July, social distancing guidance will no longer apply (see separate guidance for [Wales](#) and [Northern Ireland](#)). This means that employers do not need to implement social distancing in their business, workplace or venue, and customers, service users and employees do not need to keep apart from people they don't live with. However, in line with the Government's emphasis on a gradual return to 'normal', employers should carefully consider retaining appropriate social distancing measures where risk assessments identify that this could help reduce the spread of infections.

The government is no longer instructing people to work from home if they can, so employers can start to plan a return to workplaces. During this period of high prevalence, the government expects and recommends a gradual return over the summer. Employers should discuss the timing and phasing of a return with their employees and trade union representatives. These discussions should also include arrangements for the continuation of home working.

Employers must continue to follow statutory [health and safety requirements](#), conduct a risk assessment, and take reasonable steps to manage risks in their workplace.

Before any changes to COVID-19 control measures are implemented, risk assessments which are associated with the hazard of COVID-19 transmission should be reviewed. This needs to be undertaken in consultation with union representatives, especially where the change to the Government's guidelines and legislation removes or modifies COVID-19 controls.

Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV)

From 19 July, social distancing measures will be ended in the workplace and the government will no longer instruct people to work from home. However, CEV people are at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19 so they may wish to think particularly carefully about taking precautions when meeting others they do not usually meet with in order to reduce the risk of catching or spreading COVID-19.

CEV employees should be offered individual risk assessments and their requests to continue working from home should be properly considered and granted unless there are compelling reasons not to do so. Consideration should be given to requests from employees to be based at a site other than their usual workplace.

Employers have a [legal responsibility to protect their employees and others from risks to their health and safety](#). Employers should be able to explain to employees the measures they have in place to keep them safe at work. Some employers may request employees to undertake regular testing for COVID-19 to identify people who are asymptomatic. While we encourage this, it should be noted this is a voluntary process.

The government advises that employers should carry out a risk assessment of the workplace in line with [HSE guidance](#) and other relevant guidance for the setting, and consult with employees or trade unions and then share the results of the risk assessment with employees through their website. Separate workplaces should be risk assessed accordingly, eg. offices, vehicles, depots, call centres, schools etc each of which may present their own particular challenges and may require specific COVID-related risks to be addressed.

Employers may wish to refer to the [guidance produced by NHS Employers](#) which sets out how to enhance existing risk assessments particularly for at-risk and vulnerable groups within the workforce. It includes workers returning to work, and existing employees who are potentially more at risk due to their race and ethnicity, age, weight, underlying health condition, disability, or pregnancy.

There will be circumstances in which outbreaks of COVID in specific geographic areas will require local restrictions that may include the reintroduction of shielding. Employers will need to follow local instructions and guidance as such instances occur.

If employees were previously in the shielded categories, it should be made clear what steps are being taken to protect them, for example discussing an option to reassign them to tasks where stringent social distancing guidelines can be followed if that cannot be assured in their normal role or allowing them to continue to work from home if possible.

Other vulnerable groups

Some people, including those aged 70 and over, those with certain underlying conditions and pregnant women, are vulnerable, meaning they may be at higher risk of severe illness from coronavirus. Employers should update risk assessments and should ensure all measures are taken to minimise the risk of transmission.

Self Isolation

If an employee is fit for work but is instructed to self-isolate, their absence should not be recorded as sickness absence. We would expect all options for home or remote working to be explored with the employee. As they are 'well' at this stage they should stay on normal full pay for the duration of the self-isolation period.

Vaccinations

The NJC urges all employees who are called forward to be inoculated to ensure that they take up the opportunity as soon as possible. Employers are asked to ensure that every possible effort is made in providing employees with reasonable time off for them to receive their jab. This guidance applies equally to when subsequent doses of vaccination will need to be administered.

Face coverings

While face coverings will no longer be mandatory across the board after 19 July, it should be noted that in some areas face coverings will be required, for example on public transport in some parts of the country. The Government's guidance states that "*The government expects and recommends that people continue to wear face coverings in crowded, enclosed spaces.*" As such, following risk assessments, employers should give consideration to mandating the wearing of face coverings in workplaces, particularly those which are public spaces and / or could become crowded, along with other mitigation measures such as barriers / screens, effective ventilation, and changes to the layout of workplaces.

Yours sincerely,

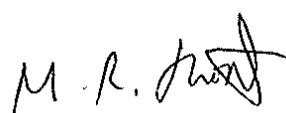
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