



# Health & Safety

*Return to Work  
Safety Protocol*

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# Health & Safety

## Return to Work Safety Protocol



*On Saturday 9th May, the Government launched its Return to Work Safely Protocol (hereinafter referred to as the Protocol), which the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, Heather Humphreys stated was mandatory.*

The Protocol is the result of a collaborative effort by the Health and Safety Authority (HSA), the Health Services Executive (HSE) and the Department of Health. It is designed to support employers and workers to put measures in place that will prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace.

Part of the collaboration involved input from the Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF), which is the forum for high level dialogue between Government, Trade Union and Employer representatives.

This collaboration concept is strongly advised at workplace level with the added emphasis on communication. Therefore, employers and workers will have regular engagement about Covid-19 and the preventive measures in the workplace, in particular as **the Protocol is a living document**, in much the same way as a safety statement is, i.e. constantly changing because of new advice.

An essential element of the communications is that of information and guidance from employers to workers with regard to:

- Signs and symptoms of Covid-19,
- How it spreads,
- Cleaning routines, e.g. touch surfaces – door handles, counters, registers etc.
- Hand and respiratory hygiene advice, e.g. hand washing techniques
- Physical distancing,
- Use of PPE, e.g. masks, gloves, face shields etc.
- Use of work equipment

Part of the collaborative process will be the appointment of at least one **lead worker representative** charged with ensuring that all control measures relevant to Covid-19 are adhered to. This can only be done if that lead worker receives appropriate training, which **Adare Human Resources Management can provide**.

As with section 26 of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005,

“...26(4) Every employer shall consider any representations made to him or her by his or her employees in relation to the matters specified in this section or any other matter relating to their safety, health or welfare at work and, so far as is reasonably practicable, take any action that he or she considers necessary or appropriate with regard to those representations”.

the Protocol stipulates that employers must have **meaningful engagement** with (a) the lead worker and (b) employees (e.g. safety committee) regarding the measures to be put in place initially, periodically etc. relevant to exposure to Covid-19 in the workplace.

Employers should use the Health and Safety Manager/Officer, if any, to implement, in consultation with the safety committee, if any, changes to work activities and infection prevention and control measures.

As some employers will not have a Health and Safety Manager/Officer in place because of the size etc. of the business, **Adare Human Resources Management have the competencies as an external competent person (S.8(2)(I) and S.18(1) of the 2005 Act) to perform this function.**

# What is required of employers?

## Develop/update Covid-19 response plan

*The following is a non-exhaustive list of what is required of employers and employees.*

### COVID-19 IDENTIFICATION AND ISOLATION POLICIES

*Employers must:*

- Keep a log of contact/group work to facilitate contact tracing
- Inform workers and others of the purpose of the log
- Display Covid-19 information signs and symbols
- Provide up-to-date information on public health advice
- Provide instruction for workers to follow if they develop signs and symptoms of Covid-19 during work.

### COVID-19 IDENTIFICATION AND ISOLATION POLICIES

*Employers must:*

- Review and revise existing sick leave policies
- Ensure occupational health (if provided) is available to address workers' concerns and communicate messages about good hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette and physical distancing
- Ensure the occupational health service (if provided) provides training and advice on measures to reduce the spread of Covid-19, as well as dealing with concerns
- Make public health advice available if there is no occupational health service
- Agree through negotiation with workers/trade unions any temporary restricting of work patterns due to Covid-19.

### IMPLEMENTING PREVENTION AND CONTROL MEASURES

*Employers must:*

- Establish and issue **pre-return to work forms for workers** to complete at least three days in advance of return to work. The form should seek confirmation that the worker has no Covid-19 symptoms, is not self-isolating or awaiting the results of a Covid-19 test
- **Provide induction training for all workers**, which should include up-to-date public health guidance, what workers should do if they develop symptoms, give details of how the workplace is organised to address Covid-19 risks, outline the Covid-19 response plan, identify points of contact and other sector specific advice
- Put in place the controls identified in the risk assessment to prevent the spread of Covid-19
- Implement temperature testing, in line with public health advice and in the knowledge that fellow workers, contractors etc **may be asymptomatic, i.e. producing or showing no symptoms**

The **pre-return to work form** (to be completed and returned at least 3 days in advance of returning to work) should ascertain:

- Workers have no symptoms of Covid-19
- The worker is not self-isolating or awaiting the results of a Covid-19 test

**Ask the worker the following and if the answer is yes, they seek medical advice:**

- Do they have symptoms of cough, fever, high temperature, sore throat, runny nose, breathlessness or flu like symptoms now or in the past 14 days
- Have they been diagnosed with confirmed or suspected Covid-19 infection in the last 14 days?
- Have they been in close contact with a person who is a confirmed or suspected Covid-19 case in the last past 14 days, contact defined as less than 2 metres for more than 15 minutes accumulative in 1 day
- Have they been advised by a doctor to self-isolate or cocoon.

## Suspected cases

### COVID-19 IDENTIFICATION AND ISOLATION POLICIES

*Employers must, where there is a suspect case:*

- Include a defined response structure that identifies the team responsible for responding to the suspected case
- Identify, in advance, a designated isolation area
- Have additional isolation areas available
- Ensure the person, who is a suspected case, can isolate behind a closed door. Where that is not possible the employer must provide an area away from other workers
- Provide, as is reasonable practicable ventilation, tissues, hand sanitiser, disinfectant, wipes, PPE, gloves, masks, clinical waste bags.

*If a worker displays symptoms during work, the manager and response team must:*

- Isolate the worker and have a procedure to accompany the worker to the designated isolation area via the isolation route, keeping two metres distant from the symptomatic person and make sure others maintain a distance of two metres
- Provide a mask for the symptomatic person, if one is available
- Assess if the unwell person can be directed to go home and call their doctor and self-isolate at home
- Facilitate the symptomatic person to remain in isolation if they cannot go home and facilitate them in calling their doctor
- Arrange transport home or to hospital for medical assessment
- Carry out an assessment of the incident to determine follow up actions
- Provide assistance and advice if contacted by the HSE.

# Hand hygiene

## *Employers must:*

- Ensure hygiene facilities are in place
- Make available advice and training on how to perform hand hygiene effectively
- Display posters on how to wash hands.

# Respiratory hygiene

## *Employers must:*

- Provide tissues as well as bags/bins for their disposal
- Empty bins at regular intervals
- Provide advice on good respiratory practice.

# Physical distancing

## *Employers must:*

- Implement a no hand shaking policy
- Where office work is essential the office must be organised so that physical distances are maintained
- Organise workers into teams who work and take breaks together
- Organise breaks to facilitate physical distancing
- Reorganise and rearrange working and break areas, for example by placing tables and chairs in canteens far enough apart
- Consider closing canteen facilities if social distancing cannot be facilitated
- If closing canteens, provide information on delivery options
- Stagger canteen use and extend serving times
- Organise a queuing system with correct distance markings
- Use card payment methods
- Allocate specific times for collections, appointments and deliverables
- Conduct, if possible, meetings using remote online technology
- Provide one-way access/egress routes
- Prevent gatherings of workers at start and finish times

- Adapt sign in/sign out systems to ensure physical distancing can be maintained
- Ensure workers sharing accommodation are grouped in fixed teams consisting of individuals who work together
- Implement physical distancing during outdoor work
- If at risk or vulnerable workers cannot work from home, they should be preferentially supported to maintain two metres distance.

## **Where It is not possible to ensure two metre distances by organisational means:**

- Install physical barriers or
- Maintain at least one metres' distance or as much distance as is reasonably practicable
- Minimise direct worker contact and provide hand washing and other hygiene aids
- Make face masks available.

# Cleaning

*Cleaning must be carried out at regular intervals.*

## *Employers must:*

- Implement thorough and regular cleaning of frequently touched surfaces
- If disinfection is required, it must be carried out as an addition to cleaning
- Ensure surfaces such as tabletops, work equipment door handles and handrails are cleaned at least twice daily
- Implement modified cleaning intervals for rooms and work areas (especially washroom facilities), with cleaning performed at least twice a day and whenever facilities are visibly dirty
- Provide workers with essential cleaning materials to keep their workspaces clean
- Increase waste collection points and ensure these are emptied regularly and at least twice a day
- Modify the use of hot desks to ensure they are available to identified staff and have appropriate cleaning materials for workers to clean before use.

# Use of PPE

## *Employers must:*

- Select PPE based on the hazard to the worker
- Provide PPE and protective clothing in accordance with the Covid-19 exposure risks identified and public health advice
- Ensure PPE, such as respirators, is properly fitted and periodically refitted
- Ensure full hygiene compliance.

## *PPE must:*

- Be consistently and properly worn when required
- Be inspected, cleaned, maintained and replaced as necessary
- Ensure workers are trained in the use, proper cleaning, storing and disposal of PPE.

# Customer facing roles

## *Employers must:*

- Eliminate physical interaction between workers and customers as much as is reasonably practicable by, for example, providing for online or phone orders and contactless delivery or managed entry
- Provide hand sanitisers at entry/exit points
- Install physical barriers to ensure contact between workers and customers is kept to a minimum and ensure queues do not form between customers as they wait to be served
- Implement a cleaning regime to ensure contact points between workers and customers are kept visibly clean at all times
- Display advice on Covid-19 measures in visible locations to ensure that customers are adhering to what is required.

# Business travel and Contractors/Visitors

## *Employers must ensure:*

- Business trips and face to face interactions should be reduced to an absolute minimum and as far as possible technological alternatives should be made available
- For necessary work trips the use of the same vehicle by multiple workers is not encouraged
- Workers should, if using their own cars, be encouraged to travel alone and at a maximum carry only one passenger who should be seated physically distant
- Workers should be provided with hand sanitisers and cleaning equipment for their work vehicle
- Contractors/visitors to workplaces where there are Covid-19 restrictions should follow the site infection prevention and control measures
- A system for recording visits to the site should be put in place
- A system for recording visits by workers to other sites should be put in place
- Induction training for contractors and visitors to the workplace should be put in place.

# Home working

## *Employers must ensure:*

- Office work and non-essential work should continue to be carried out from home where practicable
- The employer should develop and consult with workers/trade unions on working from home policies.

# First aid

As physical distance of 2 metres cannot be maintained in the event of an incident and subsequent treatment, First Aid Responders should be provided with updated training on infection prevention and control principles including hand hygiene and appropriate PPE such as face shields in particular if treating suspected cases of Covid-19, chest injuries etc. **Adare Human Resources Management can offer this training.**

# Heating, ventilation air conditioning (HVAC)

Switching off air conditioning is not required to manage the risk of Covid-19. For premises that do not have HVAC, adopt adequate ventilation by means of opening windows for example, if feasible.

# Legionella

Employers need to ensure that legionella is not a hazard, for example stagnant water over the period of lock down. **Further advice is available from Adare Human Resources Management**

# Mental Health and Well - Being

Employers must put in place support for workers who may be suffering from anxiety or stress. Workers, when they return to work, may have gone through traumatic events such as the serious illness or death of a relative or friend, or be experiencing financial difficulties or problems with their personal relationships.

Workers who are returning to the workplace after a period of isolation are likely to have concerns about the risk of infection or changes to their job due to the implementation of measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. As part of reducing stress and anxiety, employers need to communicate as to how Covid-19 is being controlled.

Employers must provide workers with information on publicly available sources of support and advice and information about the prevention and control measures taken in the workplace to reduce the risk of infection.

Employers must ensure workers are made aware of and have access to any business provided Employee Assistance Programmes or Occupational Health service.





# What is required of workers?

## Return to work

### *Workers must*

- Make themselves aware of the signs and symptoms of Covid-19
- Monitor their own wellbeing
- If they display signs or symptoms self-isolate at home and contact their GP for advice
- If they develop any symptoms during a shift or while working, immediately report that to managers.

## Implementing prevention and control measures

### *Workers must:*

- Complete and return the pre-return to work form before they return to work
- Inform their employer if there are any circumstances relating to Covid-19 not included in the form but which may need to be disclosed to allow a safe return to work
- Self-isolate and contact their GP for advice if they have any Covid-19 symptoms
- Stay out of work till all symptoms have cleared
- Take part in any induction training programme provided by their employer on return to work
- Complete temperature testing implemented by their employer.

## Hand hygiene

### *Workers must:*

- Ensure they are familiar with and follow hand hygiene
- Wash their hands with soap and water or alcohol based hand rub
- Avoid touching their eyes, mouth or nose
- Not share objects that touch their mouth, for example cups
- Use their own pens for signing in.

## Respiratory hygiene

### *Workers must:*

- Adopt good respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette and ensure they are familiar with and follow respiratory hygiene guidance.

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