

# Return to Work Safely Protocol

## Covid-19: Latest Update

Saturday May 9, 2020 saw the publication of the National Return to Work Safely Protocol by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation. The Protocol sets out clear-cut steps and processes that must be taken by all businesses to mitigate the spread of Covid-19 in the workplace and is a result of a collaborative effort led by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, and involving the Health and Safety Authority (HSA), the Department of Health and the HSE. Speaking at the announcement, Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation Heather Humphries TD stated that, "specific sectors may need to introduce additional safeguards, but this document sets the standard set of measures required in every workplace".

## Worker Representative and Health and Safety Officer

*Central to the Protocol is strong communication and a shared collaborative approach between Employers and workers.*

It is a mandatory requirement that Employers appoint and have identifiable at least one lead worker representative whose role is to work collaboratively with the Employer to assist in the implementation of measures and monitor adherence to the measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Relevant and necessary training should be provided to the worker representative by their Employer.

The Employer should use the appointed occupational safety and health officer or an external competent person (under the legislation) to ensure the effective implementation

of changes to work activities and the implementation of infection prevention and control measures in the workplace at the place of work.

For further information on our services relating to Health and Safety and how we can support the mandatory and legal requirements under the Protocols please contact Tony McDonnell, Health and Safety Consultant (CMIOSH, MIFireE), Adare Human Resource Management at [info@adarehrm.ie](mailto:info@adarehrm.ie).

## Steps for Employers and Workers to Reduce Risk of Exposure to COVID-19 in the Workplace

Any decisions to re-open a workplace shall be in done in compliance with the Government and public health advice. In this regard, Employers, in consultation with the nominated worker representative(s), must take the following steps:

### 1. Develop and/or Update the COVID-19 Response Plan

#### Employers will:

- Develop and/or update a business COVID-19 Response Plan.
- Update OHS risk assessments and safety statement.
- Address the level(s) of risk associated with various workplaces and work activities in the COVID-19 business plans and OHS risk assessments.
- Take into account worker's individual risk factors (e.g. underlying medical conditions etc.).
- Include in the plan a response plan to deal with a suspected case of COVID-19.
- Include the controls necessary to address the risks identified.
- Include contingency measures to address increased rates of worker absenteeism, implementation of the measures necessary to reduce the spread of COVID-19, changing work patterns, etc.
- Develop plans in consultation with workers and communicate once finalised.

## 2. Develop or amend policies and procedures for prompt identification and isolation of workers who may have symptoms of COVID-19, as appropriate

### Employers will:

- Keep a log of contact/group work to facilitate contact tracing.
- Inform workers and others of the purpose of the log.
- Display information on signs and symptoms of COVID-19.
- Provide up to date information on the Public Health advice issued by the HSE and Gov.ie.
- Provide instruction for workers to follow if they develop signs and symptoms of COVID-19 during work.

### Workers will:

- Be aware of the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and monitor their own wellbeing.
- Self-isolate at home and contact their GP promptly if they display any signs or symptoms.
- Report to managers immediately if any symptoms develop during the shift.

## 3. Develop, Consult, Communicate and Implement Workplace Changes or Policies

### Employers will:

- Review and revise existing sick leave policies and amend as appropriate.
- Where OHS provided, ensure it addresses worker concerns, provides training and advice.
- Communicate on good hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette and physical distancing.
- Make available HSE public health advice (and other sources as appropriate).
- Agree through normal procedures any temporary restructuring of work patterns that may be required (any existing sectoral agreements must be taken into account).

## 4. Implementing the COVID-19 Prevention and Control Measures to Minimise risk to Workers

### Employers will:

- Establish and issue a pre-return to work form for workers at least 3 days in advance of the return to work with specific questions.
- Provide induction training for all workers.
- Arrange the necessary controls identified in the risk assessment to be put in place.
- Implement temperature testing in line with Public Health advice.
- Workers will complete and comply with the above measures.

## Other Steps

The Protocols also include detailed steps, advice and information outlining;

- Steps regarding a response plan and dealing with a suspected case, including having a dedicated team and isolation area identified in advance.
- Employers obligations in dealing with at risk/ vulnerable workers, working from home, business travel and contractors/ visitors as well as detailed information on cleaning protocols and specific reference to HSPC website regarding use of recommended PPE.
- Advice for workers including public health advice and guidance and any specific direction from the Employer and detailed requirements of the Employer for any customer facing roles.
- Existing Occupational Health and Safety provisions continuing as well as addressing the protocols on reporting requirements under Occupational Health and Safety legislation, first aid and mental health and wellbeing requirements, heating, ventilation and air conditioning guidance and Employer responsibilities relating to control measures that must be put in place to avoid the potential for Legionnaires' disease in certain sectors.

It has been accepted that some sectors may already have in place measures to mitigate against the spread of Covid-19, nonetheless it is expected that all businesses review the detail of the Protocols set out by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation in full and implement all steps as prescribed under the protocols. Finally, the HSA will be the lead agency in terms of overseeing compliance with the Protocol in the workplace, but it should be noted that the details as provided in the Protocols are non-exhaustive and are also subject to change.