

## Health & Safety Considerations of Returning to Work Safely

Following Friday's announcement of localised lockdown restrictions in three counties and the recorded upsurge in Covid-19 cases, employers and employees alike are quite rightly looking at the health and safety implications of their own workspace.

The significance of this recent development cannot be underestimated and acts as a signal to other sectors to ensure plans initiated under the return to work safely protocols are fit for purpose. The Protocol itself, seeks to support employers and workers in putting measures in place that will mitigate against the spread of Covid-19 in the workplace and will act as a conduit for all employers to carry out mandatory actions in maintaining a safe place of work.

The most pertinent actions under the Protocols relate to the following:

1. Development of a Covid-19 Response Plan
2. Development of a Suspected Case Response Plan
3. Updating of Safety Statement
4. Training for Lead Worker Representative
5. Covid-19 Induction Training for all Staff

Not only are employers tasked with the management and organisation of the systems of work necessary to achieve a safe working environment under the protocols, but separately under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005. The level of compliance required may be subject to scrutiny by the proper authority, therefore, employers must ensure that the measures outlined in the Protocols continue to be fit for purpose.

**In order to comply with the Return to Work Safely Protocols Organisations must:**

***Develop a Covid-19 Response Plan, which;***

- Defines Covid-19 symptoms and how it is spread
- Offers guidance and instruction on hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, physical distancing and the necessary public health advice from the HSE and other sources as appropriate
- Outlines the appointment of the Lead Worker Representative (LWR), the duties associated with the role and the training that will be provided to the appointed person(s)
- Outlines the requirement of pre-return to work forms to be completed by workers at least three days in advance of return to work
- Outlines the implementation of preventative and control measures to minimise risk to workers through the assessment of risks and development of essential checklists.

### ***Develop a Suspected Case Response Plan, which;***

- Outlines a defined response structure
- Identifies the team responsible for responding to the suspected case
- Provides details on a designated isolation areas and additional areas as required
- Provides information on ventilation and the availability of tissues, hand sanitiser, disinfectant, wipes, PPE, gloves, masks, clinical waste bags
- Takes account of the possibility of one or more persons displaying the signs of Covid-19 in order to have additional isolation areas available, or another contingency plan for dealing with more than one case
- Outlines procedures detailing how a suspected case or cases will be dealt with
- Outlines measures to counteract the spread of the virus and procedures which mitigate the spread of the virus, should there arise a suspected case
- Outlines the procedures which deal with an assessment of a suspected or confirmed incident to determine what follow up actions are necessary.

### ***Amendments to an Organisations Safety Statement, which reflects;***

- An engagement obligation between the employer, the Lead Worker Representative and other parties
- Reference to the specific training provided or updated training required i.e., First Aid Responder training
- Measures which counteract the spread of the virus and procedures which mitigate the spread of the virus
- Risk assessments undertaken in order to identify any risk of exposure to Covid-19
- Details of the measures and controls necessary to mitigate any risk or to take account of official public health advice
- Details of changes to work activities owing to measures implemented
- Updates to occupational health and safety risk assessments.

### ***Training for Lead Worker***

The training to be provided to the Lead Worker Representative (LWR) should reference the structured framework to be followed by the LWR in order to be effective in preventing the spread of the virus. It should also detail the collaborative nature of the role in working with the employer and the Response Management team as appointed, to assist in the implementation of measures and monitor adherence to the measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19 as contained within the Response Plan. Finally, with a requirement for the LWR to be clearly identifiable all training should set clear tasks relating to the functions of the LWR especially in communicating health advice around Covid-19 in the workplace.

### ***Covid-19 Induction course for all staff prior to returning***

Crucial to the success of the measures implemented in limiting the spread of Covid-19 is the provision of induction training to all workers prior to their return to work. Induction training should include up-to-date public health guidance as well as information to workers on what they should do if they develop symptoms. Contained within the training should be details of how the workplace

is organised to address Covid-19 risks and what is outlined in the Covid-19 Response Plan. Finally, it is important that points of contact are clearly identified within the induction training and details of any other sector specific advice is given to enable all employees to be aware of what is expected of them and what that can expect from the organisation.

Risks associated with the pandemic may change, but what remains crucial to the mitigation of these risks is the steadfastness of employers and employees in implementing the necessary measures and controls. With compliance of the Protocols now centre stage it is essential that employers seek the appropriate advices in the application of vital measures to safeguard health, safety and welfare of all employees, customers and clients.

*Disclaimer – The information in this section is provided for reference purposes to assist Employers with the government protocols and guidance and must be read in that context and should not be used for or interpreted as a legal definition of any of the information provided. Professional advice should always be sought before making any such decisions.*

**For further information or advice, please contact the designated HR & Employment Helpdesk at [thewheelhrhelpdesk@adarehrm.ie](mailto:thewheelhrhelpdesk@adarehrm.ie) or via telephone on (01) 5394661  
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