

Returning to face to face work: Risk assessment

Contents

Introduction.....	1
Consultation and compliance.....	2
Universities.....	4
Charities and advice agencies.....	4
Law firms and in house teams.....	4
Other resources.....	5

Introduction

With the ongoing easing of Covid-19 restrictions, clinics may now be planning how to return to face to face work, including delivering advice sessions to clients and ensuring that operational premises are suitably equipped. [Government guidelines](#) are that people should carry on working from home if they can, and that organisations and businesses must make any workplace 'Covid-secure'. Clinics need to be ready for further changes in government guidelines - we hope that this resource is a helpful starting point to support clinics with a return to face to face working and service delivery.

Current government guidelines (July 2020) state that people who are clinically *extremely* vulnerable are strongly advised not to go into work, whilst people who are clinically vulnerable can return to work within certain guidelines. Organisations planning a return to work need to carry out [Covid-19 risk assessments](#), and many are taking a cautious, staged and flexible approach. A full return to work will be dependent on government guidelines and the premises being compliant with health and safety standards.

Considerations and reasons for returning to premises-based work for clinics may include:

- Creating capacity to cope with increased demand
- Supporting clients who cannot access support remotely, for example difficulties reading or writing or being unable to access digital services
- To support volunteers and staff who may need the office environment to deliver clinic work effectively, and to enable meetings with clients to be held securely
- To prepare the office/premises for when the clinic is able to resume normal operations

Consultation and compliance

We encourage that you find ways of consulting with the communities you serve, your clients, partners or stakeholders and your ‘workforce’ (whether staff, volunteers, students etc.,) and make evidenced-based decisions about how to remodel and deliver your services, projects and operational functions.

The use of any premises for office work or client appointments has to be fully compliant with [government health and safety requirements](#), and there may be other requirements relating to insurance and to the different settings and environments in which clinics are based. **The starting point is undertaking a robust risk assessment exercise.**

Although the risk assessment process may vary depending on the setting and context for your clinic (i.e. whether you are based within a university, law firm, advice agency or other charity) there will be certain common issues, principles and considerations relevant to all clinics:

- Controlling entry to the premises
- Identifying equipment/items needed, including PPE, and proper use of them
- Ensuring that staff, volunteers and clients are able to stay socially distanced within existing guidelines
- Ensuring that appropriate cleaning arrangements for the premises are put in place
- Providing staff and volunteers with hand sanitizers and cleaning products
- Ensuring that any face to face meetings are carried out in a safe environment and in a safe way
- Ensuring safe handling of paperwork received from clients
- Reducing the amount of shared equipment
- Making the shared toilets and facilities safe to use

Most risk assessment exercises use a simple matrix table or non-exhaustive checklist to identify risks and necessary mitigation measures, and for this to be regularly reviewed and updated, for example:

Risk	Mitigation measures	Action & completion
Covid-19 spread between members of the clinic team	<p>Rotas and log/record for presence in premises with time in/out, restrictions on total numbers, and implement physical distancing measures and/or “workplace bubbles”.</p> <p>Continue to encourage homeworking where possible.</p> <p>Arrangement of furniture / equipment / barriers / floor marking / signage to direct flow of people in workplace and maintain/enforce social distancing.</p> <p>Handwashing.</p> <p>Appropriate guidance and training for all clinics team/staff.</p>	<p><i>Who? What? By when?</i></p>

Spread of Covid-19 to or from clients or visitors	<p>Perspex screen for reception desk, logs and appointments system, remove marketing material from public areas and display appropriate Public Health England posters.</p> <p>Social distancing, handwashing for visitors, encourage conference calls by phone/online instead.</p> <p>Restrict, reduce or suspend shared use of enclosed indoor waiting areas, particularly where social distancing is difficult.</p> <p>Arrangement of furniture / equipment / barriers / floor marking / signage to direct flow of people in workplace and maintain/enforce social distancing. Guidance and information sent in advance to clients, about procedures in place to protect them.</p>	
COVID-19 transmission via communal resources, equipment or areas	<p>Cleaning protocol, including chairs in communal spaces, consider portable equipment e.g., personal laptops, special kitchen arrangements (e.g., paper towels rather than tea towels for washing up, handwashing before/after use of communal equipment - or close these areas entirely), no shared stationary.</p>	
Hygiene risks that result COVID 19 transmission or other health and safety risks	<p>Carry out thorough health and safety checks on premises facilities when reopening after an extended period of, for example in relation to use of water systems, and carry out a deep clean of all space, including cupboards and storage facilities. Ensure that premises are cleaned in line with government guidance, paying particular attention to hard surfaces, touch points and areas used by multiple people.</p>	
COVID-19 transmission via mail/packages	<p>Package cleaning and opening protocols</p>	
Public transport COVID -19 transmission risks and journey to and from workplace locations	<p>Consider private taxi options, cycling etc. Minimise travel between locations wherever possible.</p> <p>Information and help for clients plan their journeys and avoid unnecessary travel</p>	
Safety and security at premises entrance	<p>Staggered arrivals, door security e.g. a keypad (and cleaning of), lock up responsibility.</p>	
Mental health problems and poor wellbeing, COVID-19-related stigma and harassment, and impacts for those with protected characteristics	<p>Wellbeing & dignity at work policies, communicate and enforce these policies.</p> <p>Training for responsible managers with open-door approach for those needing additional support, adjust leave or working parent policies, dispel myths and encourage positivity around diversity and inclusion.</p>	

Please note, this is not intended to provide a comprehensive template or to be relied upon as a compliance tool; each clinic must satisfy itself that it has undertaken a robust risk assessment, implemented best practice and has complied with all relevant legal obligations, standards and requirements that may apply generally or within specific settings. Relevant resources and templates can be accessed by following the links below.

It is critically important that volunteers and staff are made aware of the plans taken to ensure the office/clinic environment is safe. We would urge that there should be no pressure for volunteers or staff to return to an office environment or clinic premises, particularly if they are able to work from home, and that there should be no difference in treatment of staff, advisers or volunteers who come into the premises and those who stay at home.

A [downloadable notice](#) is included in the guidance documents for employer to display in their workplaces to demonstrate that the organisation is following guidance.

Universities

Universities UK has published guidance which sets out nine principles for each university to consider when drawing up plans to reopen on a wider basis. The Department for Education (England) has now also published advice on reopening buildings and campuses.

- [Universities UK guidance: Principles and-considerations emerging from lockdown](#)
- [Department for Education: Higher education reopening - buildings and campuses](#)

UNISON, the key union for the Universities Sector has published some useful risk assessment advice.

- [UNISON Covid-19 advice for higher education staff](#)

Charities and advice agencies

There are some excellent free resources available from relevant voluntary sector bodies and consultancies.

- NCVO resources: [Supporting your staff, volunteers and beneficiaries and keeping safe](#). These resources include a [template risk register](#).
- [AdviceUK risk assessment guide](#)
- [Green Pepper Consulting resources](#)

Law firms and in house teams

The Law Society of England and Wales have published a useful and detailed toolkit including a risk assessment template; whilst focused primarily on the needs of Law Firms there is much that will be useful for clinics.

- [Law Society's safe return to the office toolkit](#)

Some of our member firms have also produces useful resources, which they have kindly agreed to share:

- [Allen and Overy: Risk assessments ten key issues](#)

- [Herbert Smith Freehills: Post lockdown issues for employers](#)
- [Eversheds Sutherland: Checklist for business restoration planning](#)

Other resources

- [ACAS returning to the workplace guide](#)
- [CIPD workplace guide returning after coronavirus](#)
- [London Growth Hub: Working safely during COVID-19](#)