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COVID19 – RETURNING TO WORK

Risk Management Guidance – Keeping your staff safe

Introduction

As organisations return to work following the UK Coronavirus Lockdown, there are many areas which need careful consideration. Employers must ensure that they've taken reasonable steps to limit the spread of COVID19.

Protector Insurance have produced this short guide to act as a prompt for the main areas for further investigation and consideration by employers. More detailed information is available on the UK Government websites. The return to work is a fast-moving situation, to help you keep up to date with the current UK Government guidance we've provided some helpful links at the end of this document.

The issues

COVID19 is a highly contagious virus and the delay in symptoms means the infection can spread rapidly before it is detected.   Around 1 in 5 persons infected are likely to require hospital treatment. The protective steps we need to take now could be in place for a prolonged period.

Next steps

COVID 19 is classed as a Biohazard, therefore a documented Risk Assessment/COSHH Risk Assessment will need to be completed by a competent person. Consider starting with collecting/analysing data on your staff, the risk of infection (particularly vulnerable people), how persons will travel to and from work and how you can organise the workplace to minimise infection. You'll need to consult and provide staff with information and training, instructions on how to comply with your precautions/safe systems of work, and also don't forget to monitor these to ensure that they remain effective and adhered to.

Businesses and workplaces should make every reasonable effort to enable working from home or alternative safe means of working, as a first option. Where working from home is not possible, workplaces should make every reasonable effort to comply with the social distancing guidelines set out by the government.

Social Distancing

The measures taken to enable social distancing will need to include travel to and from work, minimising the frequency and number of attendees within meetings, discouraging non-essential trips, spatial separation between workstations, use of screens/barriers/signage, using back-to-back or side-to-side working (rather than face-to-face) managing use of lifts, reducing congestion in the workplace, clear exit/entry points and one-way routes etc. A short checklist of other areas to consider is noted overleaf.

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Checklist

Hygiene - Staff can reduce the risk of getting and spreading infection by practicing good hygiene measures, avoiding direct hand contact with eyes, nose and mouth, washing hands with soap and water or alcohol hand sanitiser and covering any cuts or wounds. Staff should be asked to avoid direct contact with people that have a respiratory illness and avoiding using their personal items such as their mobile phone. We recommend you distribute guidance including precautions on covering nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing with disposable tissues and disposing of them in the nearest waste bin after use.

Cleaning/hand washing stations – Ensure you have sufficient locations and supplies to enable staff to practice good hygiene.

Sanitisation - The workplace and work equipment (including shared vehicles) will need to be disinfected on a regular basis, as regular handwashing and Social distancing may not be enough to provide a clean and safe workplace. At the time of writing it is thought that COVID 19 may live on hard surfaces for up to 72 hours. Consider disinfecting high-use areas frequently, such as door handles and bathrooms. Seek advice regarding the use and cleaning of air conditioning and ducted-air heating and ventilation systems.

Waste Disposal – Consider how, and how often you safely dispose of waste, including potentially contaminated waste.

Visitors/contractors – Where feasible, consider reducing the frequency and number of persons visiting your workplace.

Deliveries & Post – If it is not possible to clean/disinfect – consider using a quarantine period before handling potentially contaminated objects

Social distancing from the public – If your staff regularly come into contact with the public then additional measures may be necessary such as stopping cash payments and where possible moving card machines further away from the cashier. Gloves should be worn wherever possible when handling cash, either surgical or thin normal gloves, It is now good practice to keep as much distance between you and the customer up to 2m.

Greetings - such as shaking hands and nudging elbows, should also be avoided. a simple good morning or good afternoon will do.

Personal Protective Equipment – Suitable PPE will be necessary if you are unable to maintain social distancing, also possibly required for First Aid and cleaning tasks. Consider how you will obtain sufficient supplies of the appropriate types of PPE and how you will replace disposable PPE regularly. Wearing a face covering does not protect your staff, but it may protect others or limit spread if staff are infected but have not developed symptoms. Current Government guidance is to not use additional PPE, such as respirators/FFP3 masks in the workplace, as priority resources should be given to healthcare staff.

Contact Tracing – We suggest you keep a record/up to date calendars of all staff travel and contacts, which will enable you to track and trace potential infections, if necessary.

Links:

Local Government Association information for Councils

https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/coronavirus-information-councils

Health and Safety Executive general guidance on COVID 19 precautions

https://www.hse.gov.uk/news/coronavirus.htm

Health and Safety Executive guidance on Social Distancing

https://www.hse.gov.uk/news/social-distancing-coronavirus.htm

Mind Mental Health Charity

https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/

UK Government guidance for various industries

https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19

Institute of Occupational Safety and Health

https://iosh.com/more/news-listing/return-to-work-after-covid-19/

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