

Safe working during the COVID-19 pandemic – General guidelines for organizations

August 2020 Version 3



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Advisory Group

Acknowledgement is given to the following organizations that were involved in the development of this BSI Flex as members of the Advisory Group:

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<https://www.bsigroup.com/en-GB/topics/novel-coronavirus-covid-19/covid-19-guidelines/>

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Foreword

The current COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally shifted the way people live and work. Capturing the lessons learned as we progress through the phases of the pandemic is crucial. Whilst economic considerations are important, the fundamental principle of protecting human life underpins all economic recovery.

As the pandemic impacted different regions, many countries faced a sudden 'lockdown'. With populations confined to their own homes, organizations of all types had to change the way they operated or shut down entirely, with little or no time to prepare. Following the initial global crisis, a cycle is emerging: outbreaks are controlled and restrictions are eased, new clusters of cases emerge and restrictions need to be reintroduced.

This means a rethink of what was previously considered normal, and ensuring plans are in place to respond rapidly if restrictions are introduced, changed or eased at short notice.

All organizations face questions from their customers, suppliers, investors and the general public. The most important stakeholders for the success of an organization however, are the workers. Planning how to mitigate the effects of the pandemic is therefore crucial in order to protect workers, provide reassurance to other interested parties and to protect the organization's reputation.

Building on and complementing formal guidance issued by governments and other trusted sources such as the World Health Organization (WHO), BSI has developed this set of guidelines to assist organizations as they adjust the way they work, and to protect workers, and the people they come into contact through work, from the ongoing risks.

The third version of this document, as presented below, has been reviewed by an expert Advisory Group following a public commenting period. All comments received have been reviewed to ensure the guidelines reflect growing knowledge and emerging good practice.

Key changes in this version include the following new clauses, sub-clauses and annexes:

- a) executive summary (0.2)
- b) planning for changes to restrictions (4.8)
- c) testing, contact tracing and quarantine (5.4)
- d) protective security considerations (Annex A)
- e) accessibility and inclusion considerations (Annex B).

These guidelines are currently under consideration for development as an international document through ISO, taking into account the dynamic circumstances across the globe.

Each version of the BSI Safe Working guidelines is available on BSI's [website](#) to provide ongoing guidance to business owners, managers, workers and other users as they deal with the complexities of this changing situation and adapt their own ways of working.

The information and recommendations within this document are generally applicable to any organization that needs to manage the risks related to COVID-19, regardless of the nature of their activities or geographical location.

Comments are encouraged from users.

In this document, the following verbal forms are used:

- 1) "should" indicates a recommendation;
- 2) "may" indicates a permission; and
- 3) "can" indicates a possibility or a capability.

Use of this document

This BSI Flex takes the form of general guidance and is derived from a variety of sources. Professional advice should be obtained before applying the information included to particular circumstances.

Please note that the content in this version is part of an iterative process and changes from time to time with subsequent iterations.

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Version Control

Version 1 published May 2020 (superseded)

Version 2 published July 2020 (superseded)

Version 3 published August 2020

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0 Introduction

0.1 General

This document is a response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the increased risk this disease presents to the health, safety and well-being of people in all settings, including whilst working and in the workplace.

Governments, regulators and other professional bodies across the world have published guidance on working safely during the COVID-19 pandemic. This document aims to provide a single generic set of guidelines that complement this information and support the principle that workers should not be required to work unless all reasonable measures have been taken to manage work-related COVID-19 risks.

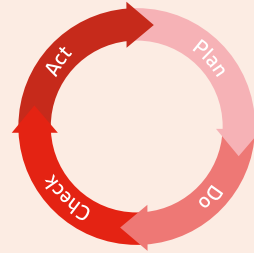
This guidance includes practical recommendations to organizations and workers on how to manage these risks and is suitable for organizations resuming operations, those that have been operational throughout the pandemic, and those that are starting operations.

The guidance is generic and applicable to organizations regardless of the nature of business, service provision, size or complexity. It recognizes that many smaller organizations do not have dedicated departments for functions such as occupational health and safety (OH&S), facilities management or human resources, and provides information for non-specialist workers performing these roles. More detailed information for specific functions is available from professional bodies and a wide range of national and international standards (see Further information at the end of this document, and the [BSI COVID-19 safe working guidelines](#) webpage).

By implementing the guidance in this document, the organization will be able to:

- a) take effective action to protect workers and other relevant interested parties from the risks related to COVID-19;
- b) demonstrate that it is addressing risks related to COVID-19 using a systematic approach; and
- c) put in place a framework to enable effective and timely adaptation to the changing situation.

This document uses a Plan – Do – Check – Act (PDCA) approach.



Plan: plan what needs to be done for the organization to work safely (4 to 8).

Do: do what the organization has planned to do (9 to 12).

Check: see how well it is working (13).

Act: fix problems and look for ways to make what the organization is doing even more effective (14).

This document is not intended to be a single step-by-step set of recommendations. It provides a framework in which the PDCA cycle should be repeated, with all parts active at all times, to enable ongoing continual improvement and ensure the organization responds to changes during the different phases of the pandemic.



0.2 Executive Summary

These guidelines have been produced by BSI with input from experts from a broad range of sectors. They provide a general framework for safe working during the pandemic, to protect people from work-related risks from COVID-19.

Benefits of using these guidelines

- a) Provides a single source of agreed good practice and accurate advice, based on current knowledge.
- b) Supports comprehensive risk assessment.
- c) Provides practical examples for ways of managing risks.
- d) Enables organizations to plan in a similar way across multiple sites and for multiple types of workers performing different activities and roles.
- e) Helps organizations to manage the risk of communicable diseases and can reduce sickness absence due to seasonal and other illness (e.g. common colds, influenza, gastric illness).
- f) Assists organizations in developing a response plan to enable rapid adjustments if risk levels or operating restrictions change at short notice.

Key points applicable to all organizations

- 1) Enhancing hygiene and enabling physical distancing are the most effective controls against communicable disease.
- 2) Minimizing the number of people in a physical workplace, and physical interaction between people, reduces the risks to workers, customers and the community.
- 3) Involving workers in decisions about managing risks leads to better engagement and performance.
- 4) Facilitating and supporting remote working enables organizations to better manage the risks to people who need to be on-site.
- 5) Managing the psychological health and well-being of workers is as important as protecting physical health and safety.
- 6) Managing the health and safety of people working remotely is critical to mitigate the impacts of ergonomic, psychosocial and other risks.
- 7) Providing effective and regular communication to workers and other relevant people is critical for success.
- 8) Ensuring ongoing planning, monitoring and adaptation of safety measures enables organizations to avoid the risk of transmission rising due to complacency or familiarity.
- 9) Maintaining and retaining accurate records of people who work closely together and customers in relevant sectors (e.g. restaurants, pubs) enables effective contact tracing.
- 10) Providing effective leadership and developing a transparent, supportive and open culture helps organizations to manage the risks related to COVID-19 and enhances an organization's ability to continue operations without severe disruption.



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1 Scope

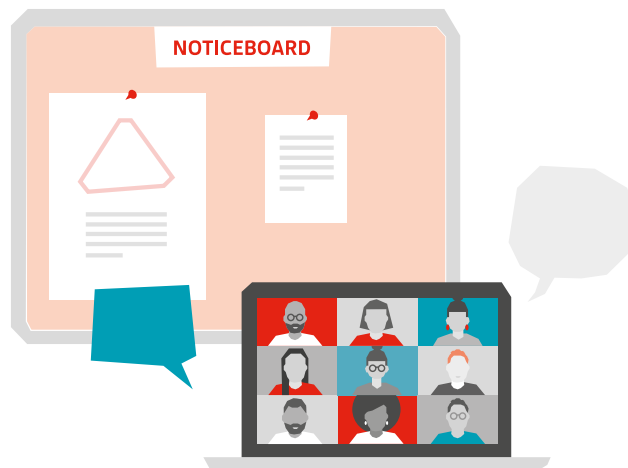
This document provides general guidance to organizations on how to manage the risks arising from COVID-19 to protect work-related health, safety and well-being.

This document is intended for use by organizations of all sizes and sectors, including those that:

- a) have been operating throughout the pandemic;
- b) are resuming or planning to resume operations following full or partial closure;
- c) are re-occupying workplaces that have been fully or partially closed; and
- d) are new and planning to operate for the first time.

This document also provides guidance relating to the protection of workers of all types, including employees, volunteers, contractors, those on zero-hours contracts, freelancers and the self-employed, and other relevant interested parties (e.g. visitors to a workplace, including members of the public).

This document does not provide specific guidance for workers in high-risk clinical roles. Organizations operating in clinical, healthcare and other settings required to implement specific infection control protocols should refer to the relevant legislation and guidance provided by the applicable government, regulators and health authorities.



2 Normative references

There are no normative references in this document.

3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the following terms and definitions apply.

3.1 organization

person or group of people that has its own functions with responsibilities, authorities and relationships to achieve its objectives

NOTE 1 to entry: The concept of organization includes, but is not limited to, sole-trader, company, corporation, firm, enterprise, authority, partnership, association, charity or institution, or part or combination thereof, whether incorporated or not, public or private.

[SOURCE: [BS EN ISO 9000:2015](#), 3.2.1, modified]

3.2 worker

person performing work or work-related activities under the control of the organization

NOTE 1 to entry: Persons perform work or work-related activities under various arrangements, paid or unpaid, such as regularly or temporarily, intermittently or seasonally, casually or on a part-time basis.

NOTE 2 to entry: Workers include top management, managerial and non-managerial persons.

NOTE 3 to entry: The work or work-related activities performed under the control of the organization may be performed by workers employed by the organization, workers of external providers, contractors, individuals, agency workers, and by other persons to the extent the organization shares control over their work or work-related activities, according to the context of the organization.

[SOURCE: [BS ISO 45001:2018](#), 3.3]

3.3 workplace

place under the control of the organization where a person needs to be or to go for work purposes

NOTE 1 to entry: The organization's responsibilities for the workplace depend on the degree of control over the workplace.

NOTE 2 to entry: Workplaces can include the worker's own home, other people's homes, personal vehicles, vehicles provided by the organization, other organization's facilities and public spaces.

[SOURCE: [BS ISO 45001:2018](#), 3.6, modified]

3.4 pandemic

worldwide spread of a disease

[SOURCE: [World Health Organization](#), modified]

3.5 COVID-19

infectious disease caused by the new coronavirus discovered in 2019

[SOURCE: [World Health Organization](#), modified]

3.6 PPE (personal protective equipment)

device or appliance designed to be worn or held by an individual for protection against one or more health and safety hazards

NOTE 1 to entry: PPE includes, but is not limited to, gowns, gloves, masks, respirators, safety glasses, helmets and goggles.

[SOURCE: [BS EN ISO 15384:2020](#), 3.12, modified]

3.7 well-being

fulfilment of the physical, mental and cognitive needs and expectations of a worker related to their work

NOTE 1 to entry: Well-being can also contribute to the quality of life outside of work.

NOTE 2 to entry: Well-being relates to all aspects of working life, including work organization, social factors at work, work environment, equipment and hazardous tasks.

[SOURCE: [ISO/DIS 45003:2020](#), 3.2, modified]

3.8 common areas

spaces and amenities provided for the use of more than one person

NOTE 1 to entry: Examples of common areas include canteens, lifts, reception areas, meeting rooms, areas of worship, toilets, gardens, fire escapes, kitchens, fitness facilities, store rooms and laundry facilities.

[SOURCE: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>, modified]

3.9 clinically vulnerable

people who can be at increased risk of contracting COVID-19

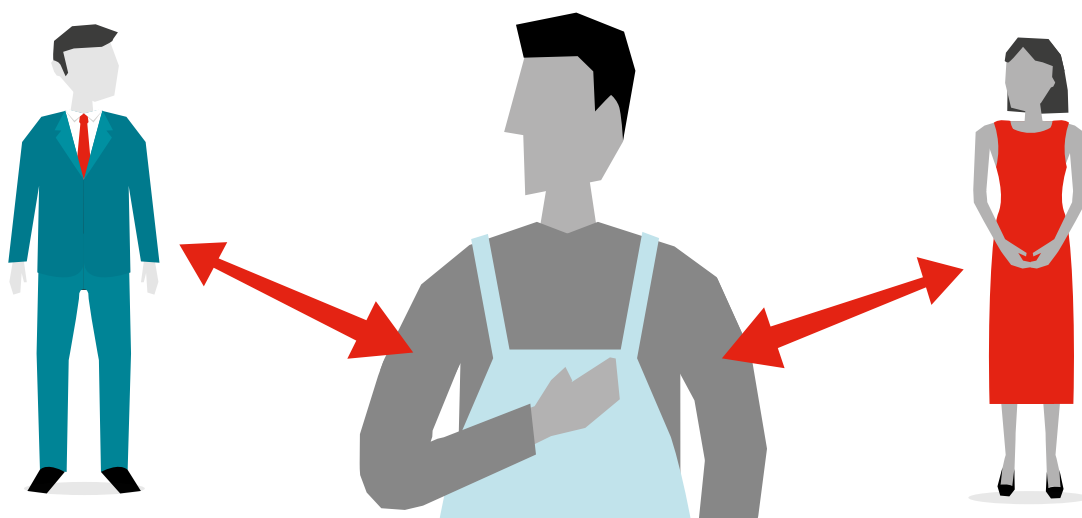
NOTE 1 to entry: Clinically vulnerable people can include those aged 70 or over, those with some underlying health conditions.

[SOURCE: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>, modified]

3.10 clinically extremely vulnerable

people with specific underlying health conditions that increase the risk of severe illness if they contract COVID-19

[SOURCE: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>, modified]



4 Planning and assessment of risks

4.1 Understanding the context of the organization

To understand the specific risks to workers and other people who can be affected by the organization's activities (e.g. visitors, customers, service users, the general public), the organization should consider what can affect the ability of individuals to work safely during the COVID-19 pandemic. How organizations should operate has changed and there is currently an increased risk to work-related health, safety and well-being.

Before assessing risks related to COVID-19, the organization should consider the specific external and internal issues that can affect its ability to work safely and how these issues have been impacted by the pandemic.

External issues can include, but are not limited to:

- a) prevalence of COVID-19 within the organization and local community;
- b) local, regional, national and international circumstances and related legal requirements and guidance;
- c) how workers travel to work (e.g. public transport, car, bicycle, walking);
- d) workers' access to childcare and schooling;
- e) workers' domestic situations (e.g. suitability of worker's home for remote working, living with the clinically vulnerable);
- f) changes or problems in the supply chain;
- g) changes in customer needs and expectations, or behaviours; and
- h) increased or decreased demand for products/services.

Internal issues can include, but are not limited to:

- 1) the number and types of workplaces (e.g. offices, factories, workshops, warehouses, vehicles, retail outlets, workers' own/other people's homes);
- 2) the type of work and related activities (e.g. manufacturing, services, retail, social care, training or other education, delivery or distribution);
- 3) the type of workers in the organization (e.g. employed, contractors, volunteers, freelance, part-time, shift workers, remote workers);
- 4) the degree to which it is possible to change a workplace to implement physical distancing measures;

- 5) individual needs of workers (e.g. the clinically vulnerable, workers with caring responsibilities, disabled workers, pregnant women and new mothers, older workers);
- 6) increased worker absence (e.g. due to sickness, self-isolation or quarantine requirements, bereavement);
- 7) resource availability, including adequate provision of toilet and handwashing facilities; and
- 8) how work is organized (e.g. changed work demands, pace of work, time pressure, shift work) and supported and how this impacts work-related health, safety and well-being.

The organization should take these issues into account when assessing risk and planning to begin, resume or modify operations.

4.2 Leadership and worker participation

To assist effective management of the risks arising from COVID-19 relating to work, owners, managers and other decision makers in the organization should:

- a) demonstrate leadership and commitment to collective responsibility and safe working practices, through effective communication and by complying with internal policy, and legal and other requirements at all times;
- b) promote a culture of transparency and support in relation to reporting and managing suspected and confirmed cases of COVID-19 (see 5);
- c) ensure adequate resources are provided (see 8) and make them available to all relevant workers in a timely and effective manner;
- d) ensure consultation and participation of workers, worker representatives and relevant trade unions in making decisions that affect work-related health, safety and well-being;
- e) communicate how workers and other relevant interested parties should report incidents or raise concerns and how these will be addressed and communicated; and
- f) protect workers from reprisals when reporting incidents or if workers remove themselves from unsafe work situations.

The organization has a duty of care to workers and other interested parties who can be affected by their activities, including customers, service users and the general public.

The people who do the work are often more aware of risks related to their role, including the risks to other interested parties, and understand them better than the people at the highest levels of the organization. By encouraging wide input, the organization can have a better overview of risks to work-related health, safety and well-being during the pandemic. Active and ongoing engagement with workers and worker representatives is likely to result in better outcomes when managing the risks related to COVID-19.

The organization should:

- 1) involve workers, worker representatives and relevant trade unions in assessing risks related to COVID-19 and making decisions on how to manage them;
- 2) communicate to workers and other relevant interested parties (e.g. the public, customers, suppliers, visitors, students, investors, shareholders, regulators, unions) how the organization is managing risks from COVID-19 (communication can be through any appropriate method, see 9);
- 3) provide one or more ways for workers and other interested parties to give feedback on actions taken to manage work-related health, safety and well-being (e.g. through virtual meetings, collaboration tools, online surveys, emails); and
- 4) take timely and appropriate action to address concerns raised by workers and other interested parties and communicate these actions to them.

The organization should ensure that worker representatives reflect the full diversity of the workforce and take into account the specific experiences, views and needs of, for example, workers with disabilities, women, workers from different ethnic and faith groups, and workers of different ages.

4.3 General planning

Planning for safe working enables the organization to identify and prioritize risks arising from the pandemic that can affect work-related health, safety and well-being.

Although it is not possible to eliminate the risks related to COVID-19 entirely, planning should aim to ensure the risk to workers is reduced to the lowest reasonably practicable level.

When planning for safe working, the organization should consider the issues determined in 4.1, and take into account:

- a) practical changes that should be made to how work is organized and where work takes place;
- b) interaction between workers and between workers and other people, including visitors, customers and members of the public;
- c) how to maintain complete and accurate contact information for people who interact closely (e.g. workers in shifts, customers in pubs and restaurants, clients in gyms) for the purpose of contact tracing, respecting the need for confidentiality;
- d) the safe use of common areas and shared equipment; and
- e) the impact of the pandemic on psychological health and well-being.

The organization should take a systematic approach to determining and addressing risks related to COVID-19 and identify work activities that:

- 1) can be done from home;
- 2) cannot be done from home but can comply with physical distancing guidelines in the workplace, if practical adjustments are made; and
- 3) cannot be done from home and cannot comply with physical distancing guidelines in the workplace.

The best way to mitigate work-related risks from COVID-19 is to enable and support workers to work from home, including in organizations that have fully implemented controls to protect against transmission of the disease. The organization should continue to minimize the number of workers in a physical workplace to provide enhanced protection through reduced contact with other people.

The organization should ensure additional support measures are implemented to protect the psychological health and well-being of workers who are working from home. The organization should consider if it is possible to enable a safe return to the physical workplace for individual workers if the home is not suitable or if home working has a significant negative impact on their psychological health and well-being.

Work activities that cannot be done from home and cannot comply with physical distancing guidelines with practical adjustments may only take place if they are essential for the operation of the organization and additional controls are implemented to mitigate the risks.