Who this guidance is for

This guidance is intended for all workplaces involved in the manufacturing, processing, warehousing, picking, packaging, retailing and service of food.

This also includes important information about the risk of community dissemination of coronavirus (COVID-19) from circumstances or activities related to the workplace such as transportation and accommodation arrangements.

This guidance is of general nature and is intended to be compatible with the relevant health and safety legislation, please note that if there appears to be a conflict between this guidance and the relevant health and safety legislation, the latter shall prevail.

Symptoms

The most important symptoms of COVID-19 are recent onset of any of the following:

- a new continuous cough
- a high temperature
- a loss of, or change in, your normal sense of taste or smell (anosmia)

For most people COVID-19 will be a mild illness. However, anyone who develops symptoms needs to self-isolate at home and not go to work, following stay at home guidance. They should arrange to have a test by visiting testing or contacting NHS 119 by telephone if they do not have internet access.

What you need to know about COVID-19 and food

Although it is very unlikely that COVID-19 is transmitted through food or food packaging, as a matter of good hygiene practice your staff should wash their hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. This should be done routinely, including:

- before and after handling food
- before handling clean cutlery, dishes, glasses, or other items to be used by the customer
- after handling dirty or used items, such as collecting used dishes from customer tables
- after handling money
- after touching high-contact surfaces, such as door handles
- when moving between different areas of the workplace
- after being in a public place
- after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing. Coughs and sneezes should be caught in a tissue or the crook of your elbow

Food packaging should be handled in line with usual food safety practices and staff should continue to follow existing risk assessments and safe systems of working. Food business operators should continue to follow the Food Standard Agency's (FSA) guidance on personal hygiene and hygienic practices in food preparation, Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP)

processes and [guidance on risk assessment](#) from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

Individuals returning to work after an absence of 2 or more days for whatever reason will benefit from a screening process for fitness to work, using a monitored screening questionnaire such as the full [Fitness to Work guidance](#) which has a sample questionnaire at Annex 3.

Food hygiene guidance

A Food Safety Management System (FSMS) that includes [existing food hygiene guidance](#) and HACCP processes should be followed. Where you have made changes to your routine ways of working in response to COVID-19 it is important to review your [HACCP](#) procedures to consider and reflect any impact from these changes on food safety. The FSA has provided [guidance for food businesses](#) on adapting and reopening due to COVID-19 and [guidance for food businesses undertaking a rapid shut-down in response to COVID-19](#).

You should stress the importance of more frequent hand washing and maintaining good hygiene practices in food preparation and handling areas as described above.

The [FSA Safe Method checklist](#) allows employers to assess the personal hygiene and fitness to work practices in their workplace.

This guidance addresses the additional measures required for employers and employees of food businesses in response to COVID-19.

The aim of this guidance is to:
- reduce the risk of COVID-19 cases entering the workplace

- reduce the risk of COVID-19 spreading within the workplace
- reduce the risk of COVID-19 spreading from the workplace to the wider community
- reduce the impact of COVID-19 on output and production from the food industry

Prevention and management of outbreaks – the role of employers

Employers and managers must take steps to support their staff to adhere to government guidance to keep the workplace safe during the COVID-19 pandemic. Employers and managers should conduct a COVID-19 workplace risk assessment and prepare and keep updated a business continuity plan.

All controls should be supported by increased visible monitoring and its enforcement by management. It is strongly recommended that there should be visible marshalling by dedicated staff at all points and in particular where staff may congregate or at 'pinch' points where people flow into and out of the building or site.

You should conduct regular and appropriate reviews including seeking feedback from staff to identify areas for improvement and to guide individuals not following best practice.

Employers should be aware of the guidance on shielding and protecting people who are clinically extremely vulnerable, which gives the latest guidance for the

clinically extremely vulnerable, including advice on attending work or working from home.

Workplace risk assessment

COVID-19 is a new risk that must be incorporated into workplace risk assessments. Employers must therefore carry out a COVID-19 risk assessment if they have not already done so. This will enable employers to mitigate and manage the potential risks posed by COVID-19 for their employees and their businesses. The Health and Safety Executive has published guidance to help employers conduct a COVID-19 risk assessment.

It is vital that employers play their part by:

- reducing risk to an acceptable level through implementing the recommendations in this and other relevant guidance that applies to their workplace
- encouraging and enabling workers to follow any advice to self-isolate and supporting them when in isolation

The NHS Test and Trace service is key to helping manage the risk of COVID-19 spreading further in the community and in workplaces. It is essential that you take steps to enable your staff to comply with the requirements of this service.

During the current period of national lockdown, the government has ordered certain businesses and venues to close or restrict how they provide goods and services. Hospitality will be limited to takeaway and delivery. Businesses and organisations that remain open must follow further regulations to make their premises COVID-secure:

- employers must not knowingly require or encourage someone who is being required to self-isolate to come to work
- businesses must remind people to wear [face coverings where mandated](#)

Where the enforcing authority, such as the HSE or your local authority, identifies employers who are not taking action to comply with the relevant public health legislation and guidance to control public health risks, they are empowered to take a range of actions to improve control of workplace risks. For example, this could include employers not taking appropriate action to ensure social distancing where possible.

Failure to complete a risk assessment which takes account of COVID-19, or completing a risk assessment but failing to put in place sufficient measures to manage the risk of COVID-19, could constitute a breach of health and safety law. The actions the enforcing authority can take include the provision of specific advice to employers to support them to achieve the required standard, through to issuing enforcement notices to help secure improvements. Serious breaches and failure to comply with enforcement notices can constitute a criminal offence, with significant fines and even imprisonment for up to 2 years. There is also a wider system of enforcement which includes specific obligations and conditions for licensed premises.

Employers are expected to respond to any advice or notices issued by enforcing authorities rapidly and are required to do so within any timescales imposed by the enforcing authorities. Employers are expected to join with

the UK's fight against COVID-19 by working with the government and their sector bodies to protect their workers and the public. Inspectors are carrying out compliance checks nationwide to ensure that employers are taking the necessary steps.

Cohort approach

Wherever possible employees should be organised into cohorts or groups built around natural work teams. Cohorts work together, take their breaks together, change together, and travel together if relevant. If one person then becomes infected this increases the ability for only members of that particular cohort to be excluded from the workplace and facilitates the smoother running of the facility.

Consider creating cohorts or groups of staff to minimise contact and reduce potential transmission. Cleaning should also be scheduled around zones and cohort lines.

Communication with employees

Communication with employees should be a high priority, and should include:

- visual messages, with use of pictures of good and bad practice, in addition to written information
- frequent updates of communication (weekly is suggested) to prevent it becoming stale. Regular communication, even if there is little new to share, is important to reinforce key messages and prevent false information from circulating
- live communication, TV screens, and digital signs where feasible

- [easy-to-translate communication materials](#) which can be translated, using free-to-use online translation services, into the preferred languages of employees if English is not their first language

Accommodation and transport

Where you are responsible for providing accommodation and transport to the workplace for staff, the following considerations are recommended.

Shared accommodation

Shared accommodation is not recommended with the current risk of transmission of COVID-19. Every effort should be made to:

- secure single occupancy accommodation for workers. If this is not possible, occupancy in each shared space should be as low as possible
- schedule access to shared spaces such as kitchens and living areas in the provided accommodation to limit crowding and promote social distancing
- organise workers in shared residential accommodation to be within the same cohort in the workplace where possible (see cohort approach above)
- make arrangements for back-up single occupancy accommodation to allow workers who become unwell to self-isolate (for those in close contact with unwell workers, see contact tracing below)

Transport arrangements

Transport arrangements should be in line with published [guidance when transporting workers from their accommodation to place of work](#).

Where possible, shared transport should be avoided, but if unavoidable:

- minimise the number of workers in each vehicle. Consider multiple trips with fewer persons
- consider cohorting workers who share accommodation and work area and transporting them in their cohort
- recommend that face coverings are worn in shared transport as required for public transport. [Guidance on face coverings](#) is available
- inform workers that if unwell they should stay at home and should not use shared transport or go to work. Consider using visible marshals to ensure unwell staff do not board shared transport. Anyone showing symptoms of COVID-19 in transit should be taken off the shared transport, returned to their accommodation and be supported to follow the [stay at home guidance](#)
- guidance on additional cleaning measures for vehicles when a person has fallen ill can be found in [cleaning of non-healthcare settings](#)

Safety throughout the facility including entry points

Consider staggering shift starting times to minimise crowding at entry points.

Ensure social distancing of 2 metres if possible while awaiting entry, and if not ensure maximum feasible social distancing is practised.

Hand washing facilities or hand sanitiser should be available at all entry points to the workplace and

throughout the workplace. Hand hygiene stations should be checked regularly and supplies replenished.

Hand hygiene should be promoted at break times and between shifts. Notices should be placed to reinforce this. Consider designating managers or senior staff to act as visible marshals to supervise entry points.

Limit opportunities for contact between staff permanently based at the workplace and transient staff such as hauliers, transport staff and contractors. Further information and guidance can be found in [Working safely during COVID-19](#).

Limit unnecessary visits to the site.

Ensure staff are dressed in an agreed and approved manner – any personal protective equipment (PPE), work wear or face coverings issued and/or approved by you should not introduce a hazard to food safety. The selection of appropriate PPE and work wear is the employer's responsibility and representatives and workers should be consulted on selection.

Respiratory hygiene should be promoted at all times. This means coughing and/or sneezing into a tissue and disposing of it immediately or coughing and/or sneezing into the crook of the elbow followed by hand washing.

Display information in appropriate languages throughout the workplace.

Consider use of CCTV as an aid to assist with monitoring compliance with social distancing and hygiene measures, including in communal areas outside the main workspace.

Maintaining social distancing within the workplace

Consider reducing staffing density in the workplace by:

- staggering shift start and end times
- reducing the number of workers per shift if possible
- creating a break between shifts supported by visible marshalling, to minimise overlap and to enable effective cleaning of the working areas

Wherever possible, social distancing of 2 metres between workers must be facilitated, both when working alongside each other and when working face-to-face. If production lines do not permit 2 metres distancing face-to-face working should be avoided.

Where social distancing of 2 metres cannot be implemented consider whether further mitigation measures such as redesigning the task or adding physical barriers can be considered. If not, PPE or face coverings are recommended in some areas to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 transmission, where this is compatible with food hygiene.

Communal areas

COVID-19 transmission may be a particular concern in communal areas, in particular smoking areas, canteens, rest areas, toilets and locker rooms due to difficulties in maintaining social distancing.

You should undertake the following actions:

- ensure handwashing facilities or hand sanitiser are available at the entrance to all communal areas, and provide reminders to use these on entrance and exit

- increase the frequency of cleaning, especially surfaces that are regularly touched by hand, such as table tops, drinks levers, keypads, grab-rails, elevator buttons, light switches and door handles
- make social distancing more manageable by increasing the amount of existing communal space that can be used to support improved social distancing measures
- consider measures such as greater use of outdoor space, marquees, or other temporary structures where feasible
- establish improved documentation (standard operating procedures) for the cleaning and checking of all communal areas in the same way that HACCP applies in production areas

Staff canteens and restaurants

Hand washing facilities or hand sanitiser must be available at the entrance to canteens and their use should be supervised.

Break times should be staggered to ensure no overcrowding, so that staff can adhere to social distancing rules.

Queue points on the floor should be clearly marked to ensure social distancing is possible.

There should not be any sharing of food and drink by staff who do not share a household.

Minimise self-serving options for food and drink. As far as possible, food served and/or displayed should be individually wrapped to minimise contact and avoid spread of infection.

Increase the frequency of cleaning, especially hand touch surfaces, such as table tops, drinks levers, keypads, grab-rails, elevator buttons, light switches, door handles, and any surface or item which is designed to be, or has a high likelihood of being touched.

Plates, cutlery and glasses should be handwashed in hot soapy water or washed with detergent in a dishwasher rated for disinfection.

Canteens and restaurants should be thoroughly cleaned after each group of staff use them.

All doors and windows should remain open wherever possible to allow greater ventilation and prevent touching of window handles (subject to appropriate fly screening).

A system to reduce the use of cash for food or to facilitate the exclusive use of debit cards and contactless payment should be considered.

Where possible, cohorts of workers should be matched to zoned canteen areas (see below for description of cohort working).

Workplace canteens providing on-site (sit-in) services must now:

- ask at least one member of every party of customers or visitors (up to 6 people) to provide their name and contact details
- keep a record of all staff working on their premises and shift times on a given day and their contact details
- keep these records of customers, visitors and staff for 21 days and make them available when requested by NHS Test and Trace or local public health officials to help contain clusters or outbreaks

- display an official NHS QR code poster from 24 September 2020, so that customers and visitors can 'check in' using this option as an alternative to providing their contact details
- adhere to General Data Protection Regulations

You should collect this information in a way that is manageable for your establishment. If the information cannot be collected in advance, it should be collected at the point that visitors enter the premises.

Further information [about these requirements](#) is available.

Locker rooms and toilets

Systematic, more frequent and effective cleaning of locker rooms and toilets should be implemented, verified and documented. Emphasis should be on hand touch surfaces such as taps, door handles and flush handles.

If social distancing is not possible in locker rooms, consider using more space, for example, erecting temporary or prefabricated additional space.

Steps that will usually be needed to ensure and promote good hygiene, social distancing, and cleanliness in toilet facilities include:

- using signs and posters in appropriate styles and languages to build awareness of good handwashing technique, the need to increase handwashing frequency and to avoid touching your face, and to cough or sneeze into a tissue which is binned safely, or into your arm if a tissue is not available
- consider the use of social distancing marking in areas where queues normally form, and the adoption

of a limited entry approach, with one in, one out (while avoiding the creation of additional bottlenecks)

- to enable good hand hygiene, consider making hand sanitiser available on entry to toilets where safe and practical, and ensure suitable handwashing facilities including running water and liquid soap and suitable options for drying (either paper towels or hand driers) are available
- setting clear use and cleaning guidance for toilets, with increased frequency of cleaning in line with usage. Use normal cleaning products, paying attention to frequently hand touched surfaces, and consider use of disposable cloths or paper roll to clean all hard surfaces
- keep the facilities well ventilated, for example by fixing doors open where appropriate
- special care should be taken for cleaning portable toilets and larger toilet blocks
- putting up a visible cleaning schedule that can be kept up to date
- providing more waste facilities and more frequent rubbish collection

Within designated work areas and work stations

Offices

To help contain the virus, during the period of [national lockdown](#) office workers who can work effectively from home must do so. Apart from those who are clinically extremely vulnerable, anyone who cannot work from home can go to their place of work. Extra consideration

should be given to those people at higher risk who are at work.

Face-to-face meetings should be minimised and replaced with virtual meetings where possible. This may not be practical for meetings with plant staff. Where other communications are not suitable social distancing measures should be implemented.

COVID-19 specific management and staff meetings should be put in place and should take place regularly.

Production lines

There should be a break in the time between the end of one shift and the start of another. This will help to ensure social distancing between workers entering and leaving and will allow for effective cleaning of the working area.

Notice boards and television units should display information on COVID-19, particularly on hand hygiene, social distancing and respiratory hygiene. Infographics and appropriate languages should be used where possible.

Supermarkets

Supermarkets need to avoid crowding and create adequate spacing between individuals. Effective measures to support this will vary by store and location but could include:

- monitoring the number of customers within store and limiting access to avoid congestion
- implementing queue management systems to limit crowds gathering at entrances and maintaining 2 metres distance
- reminding customers to only buy what they need

- using screens or barriers to separate people from each other, where feasible

For safety of staff, see guidance on [working safely in supermarkets and shops](#).

See also guidance on [takeaways and restaurants offering a pick-up service](#).

Staff in retail and hospitality settings are required to wear a [face covering](#) unless exempt. If businesses have taken steps to create a physical barrier or screen between workers and members of the public then staff behind the barrier or screen will not be required to wear a face covering. Enforcement action can be taken if barriers and screens are in place which do not adequately mitigate risks.

All businesses must remind customers to wear a face covering where mandated, for example by displaying posters.

Managing COVID-19 cases in the workplace

Employers need to consider carefully what is expected of them if one of the workers becomes unwell. This section provides guidance on actions recommended if a worker becomes unwell with possible coronavirus (COVID-19) infection, and concerning other workers who were in contact with the unwell worker.

Case development within the workplace

If anyone develops symptoms of COVID-19 in the business or workplace they should be sent home and

advised to follow the [stay at home guidance](#) and seek a test.

If a member of staff has helped someone who has developed symptoms of COVID-19, they do not need to go home unless they develop symptoms themselves. They should wash their hands thoroughly for 20 seconds after any contact with someone who is unwell with symptoms consistent with COVID-19 infection. If the person who has been sent home is subsequently confirmed as having COVID-19, they may be contacted by NHS Test and Trace and asked to self-isolate.

It is not necessary to close the business or workplace or send any staff home unless you are advised to do so following investigation by the relevant authorities. You should keep monitoring the government response to COVID-19 for further updates.

Contact tracing: contact with co-workers

Contact tracing is an important step in stopping the spread of COVID-19.

When someone develops symptoms of COVID-19, they should arrange to obtain a test and alert people they have been in close contact with in the 48 hours before symptom onset. If any of those close contacts are co-workers, the person who has developed symptoms may wish to (but is not obliged to) ask their employer to alert those co-workers.

The NHS Test and Trace service will follow up with people who need to self-isolate because they have had recent close contact with someone who has tested

positive for COVID-19. More detailed [guidance on the NHS Test and Trace service for employers, businesses and workers](#) is available. If someone who has tested positive has recently visited or attended a food business, the contact tracing process will be escalated to the local Public Health England (PHE) health protection team, who will liaise as necessary with the manager of that facility.

Supporting workers who need to self-isolate

As described in the [NHS Test and Trace workplace guidance](#), you should support workers who need to self-isolate and must not knowingly require or encourage someone who is being required to self-isolate to come to work.

Outbreak preparedness

You should ensure:

- a plan of communication with staff and others is included as part of the business continuity plan
- a single point of contact (SPOC) is nominated. This will ensure that the correct contact point for outbreak management is identified in advance of any outbreak. This individual will lead on liaison with local public health teams

Multiple cases in the workplace

If there is more than one case of COVID-19 associated with your workplace, you should contact your local PHE health protection team to report the suspected outbreak. [Find your local PHE health protection team](#).

If the local PHE health protection team declares an outbreak in the setting, you will be asked to record details of symptomatic staff and assist with identification of contacts. You should therefore ensure all employment records are up to date. You will be provided with information about the outbreak management process, which will help you to implement control measures, assist with communications to staff, and reinforce prevention messages.

Outbreak management

The heath protection team will:

- undertake a risk assessment
- provide public health advice
- where necessary, establish a multi-agency incident management team to manage the outbreak

The team will request basic background information on your staff including numbers, shift patterns and rotas, details of your site and information on measures in place such as social distancing, hand hygiene and cohorting. The team will assist you with contact tracing in the workplace and provide advice on self-isolation for staff, contacts and their households. They will also provide advice on infection prevention and control, cleaning, and any further control measures required. Depending on the size and/or spread of the outbreak, they may need to undertake wider testing of the workforce. You will be kept informed through the process.

To help you manage any identified outbreak, you will be sent a resource pack by your local PHE health protection team or local authority. This pack will provide you with information, practical advice and will include details of

the roles and responsibilities of all the agencies involved in COVID-19 outbreaks in food businesses.

Cleaning and waste disposal

Employers should ensure that objects and surfaces that are touched regularly are cleaned and disinfected using standard cleaning products.

Guidance on cleaning and waste disposal to help businesses reduce the spread of coronavirus government is available from [FSA guidance](#) and [PHE guidance](#).