

Returning to Work & Your Safety

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This page sets out things that should happen before you return to work, how the law protects you, how risks can be managed and how your voices can be heard.

Click on each question to reveal information.

What should happen before I return to work?

Employers **must** carry out a risk assessment, looking specifically at risk of exposure to Covid-19, before anyone returns to work.

They must use this to take steps to reduce the risk of employees catching this virus to as low as possible.

Risk assessments must be carried out by a '**competent**' person – someone who knows and understand both the workplace and the work.

In GMB recognised workplaces, we expect Safety Reps to be consulted on any risk assessment carried out.

Examples of steps that can be used to reduce COVID 19 risk are:

- Putting measures in place to allow a 2 metre distance between colleagues, e.g. floor markings and taped off workstations



- Adding extra hygiene facilities such as hand sanitiser stations
- Keeping doors open where safe to do so
- Staggering start, break and finish times
- Providing PPE for job roles where workers have to be less than 2 metres apart

These measures must be put in place and tested before workers return to the workplace.

What does the law say?

The law requires employers to do this, the **Health and Safety at Work act 1974** and the regulations that sit under it are there to keep us all safe at work.

This law covers not only direct employees but also anyone carrying out work for the employer (e.g. contractors and agency staff) and anyone affected by the work activity of the employer.

The Management of **Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999**, also known as the Management Regs, detail what employers are required to do to comply with the Health Safety at Work Act.

Regulation 3 states that the employer must perform a suitable and sufficient risk assessment. This risk assessment must identify **hazards** and evaluate the risk then put effective controls in place to eliminate or reduce the risk and manage the work process so that it is safe. Risk assessments must identify hazards that could cause both physical or mental harm.

A hazard is something with that could cause harm or injury.

The risk is how likely harm or injury can be caused by a hazard.

Any risk assessments carried out must be recorded and stored by the employer and reviewed whenever more workers return to work; work processes are restarted; or cases of Covid-19 are suspected or confirmed.

Employees must also work in a safe manner, complying with health and safety control measures, such as wearing PPE and taking part in training.

They must also inform the employer of any serious and imminent danger or any potential hazards (i.e. near misses).

How should risk be managed?

What is a Risk Matrix?

The HSE risk matrix multiplies the likelihood of harm by how severe the harm could be. These can be subjective so they should be agreed with the GMB safety rep. After the risk matrix has been calculated the risks can be prioritised.

(HSE.gov.uk/risk/faq, 2020)



Employers should then use the hierarchy of control approach to eliminate or reduce the risk of Covid-19.

The most common risk matrices are 3 x 3, as in the graphic, or a more detailed 5 x 5 matrix. Either is acceptable, so long as there is clear escalation of risk – the more likely and harmful, the greater the risk.

What is the Hierarchy of Controls?

Employers are required to adopt a hierarchy of control approach which is set out in Regulation 4, Schedule 1 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. Employers must first see if it is possible to remove the risk altogether, if it is not possible then the risks should be controlled using principles in the following order:

(Safety+Health Magazine, 2018)

How can workers' voices be heard?

The Safety Reps and Safety Committees Regulations 1977 (SRSC) state that Safety reps should be involved in the process of risk assessment from the start. The SRSC regs are sometimes referred to as the 'Brown Book'. These regulations also give safety reps the right to carry out inspections, attend safety committees and then report back to colleagues.

[See our checklist to support you through the risk assessment process here](#)