



Briefing 20-28

April 2020

APSE COVID-19 Support: HSE Updates on COVID 19

1. Introduction

As the COVID-19 situation continues to develop the HSE are providing regular updates on issues that have arisen. This short briefing covers three issues: -

- The Application of RIDDOR to COVID-19 where a worker has been diagnosed as having COVID 19 and there is reasonable evidence that it was caused by exposure at work.
- Protection of home workers and suggested measures by employers
- Welfare facilities for delivery drivers

2. RIDDOR reporting of COVID-19

The HSE has clarified the application of RIDDOR to COVID-19 cases that have occurred in workplaces. The information is as follows: -

'You must only make a report under RIDDOR (The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013) when:

- an unintended incident at work has led to someone's possible or actual exposure to coronavirus. This must be reported as a dangerous occurrence.

or

- a worker has been diagnosed as having COVID 19 and there is reasonable evidence that it was caused by exposure at work. This must be reported as a case of disease.

What to report

Dangerous occurrences. Read about RIDDOR [regulation 7, Schedule 2 – Section 10 on legislation.gov.uk](https://www.legislation.gov.uk)

If something happens at work which results in (or could result in) the release or escape of coronavirus you must report this as a dangerous occurrence. An example of a dangerous occurrence would be a lab worker accidentally smashing a glass vial containing coronavirus, leading to people being exposed.

Cases of disease: exposure to a biological agent

Read about RIDDOR [regulation 9 \(b\) on legislation.gov.uk](#)

If there is reasonable evidence that someone diagnosed with COVID-19 was likely exposed because of their work you must report this as an exposure to a biological agent using the case of disease report. An example of a work-related exposure to coronavirus would be a health care professional who is diagnosed with COVID-19 after treating patients with COVID-19.

Make a RIDDOR report online

Find out more about [what you must report](#).

Make a report online:

- [Report a dangerous occurrence](#)
- [Report a case of disease: exposure to a biological agent](#)

3. Protect home workers

The HSE advice is as follows: -

As an employer, you have the same health and safety responsibilities for home workers as for any other workers.

When someone is working from home, permanently or temporarily, as an employer you should consider:

- How will you keep in touch with them?
- What work activity will they be doing (and for how long)?
- Can it be done safely?
- Do you need to put control measures in place to protect them?

Lone working without supervision

There will always be greater risks for lone workers with no direct supervision or anyone to help them if things go wrong.

Keep in touch with lone workers, including those working from home, and ensure regular contact to make sure they are healthy and safe.

If contact is poor, workers may feel disconnected, isolated or abandoned. This can affect stress levels and mental health.

[Find out more on lone working](#)

Working with display screen equipment

For those people who are working at home on a long-term basis, the risks associated with using display screen equipment (DSE) must be controlled. This includes doing home workstation assessments.

However, there is no increased risk from DSE work for those working at home temporarily. So, in that situation employers do not need to do home workstation assessments.

You could provide workers with advice on completing their own basic assessment at home.

[**This practical workstation checklist \(PDF\)- Portable Document Format may help them.**](#)

There are some simple steps you can take to reduce the risks from display screen work:

- breaking up long spells of DSE work with rest breaks (at least 5 minutes every hour) or changes in activity
- avoiding awkward, static postures by regularly changing position
- getting up and moving or doing stretching exercises
- avoiding eye fatigue by changing focus or blinking from time to time

Specialised DSE equipment needs

Employers should try to meet those needs where possible.

For some equipment (e.g. keyboards, mouse, riser) this could mean allowing workers to take this equipment home. For other larger items (e.g. ergonomic chairs, height-adjustable desks) encourage workers to try other ways of creating a comfortable working environment (e.g. supporting cushions). [**Our brief guide has more information.**](#)

Stress and mental health

Home working can cause work-related stress and affect people's mental health.

Being away from managers and colleagues could make it difficult to get proper support.

Keep in touch

- Put procedures in place so you can keep in direct contact with home workers so you can recognise signs of stress as early as possible.
- It is also important to have an emergency point of contact and to share this so people know how to get help if they need it.

4. Arrangements for driver welfare and hours of work: coronavirus (COVID-19)

Driver access to welfare facilities

Concerns have been raised that drivers who are delivering to premises are occasionally being denied access to Welfare Facilities. It is therefore important that local councils in receipt of deliveries acknowledge and abide by the regulations which protect drivers – even if those drivers are not their employees. The HSE advice is as follows: -

‘All drivers must have access to welfare facilities in the premises they visit as part of their work.

We are hearing reports that some drivers are not being allowed to use welfare facilities when they deliver. Preventing access is against the law, equally it’s not the sensible thing to do.

Those who already provide reasonable access to toilets and handwashing facilities should continue to do so.

With the latest advice for hands to be washed regularly, failure to allow access to welfare facilities may increase the risk of the COVID-19 infection spreading.’

APSE Comment

The HSE has stated that it will take a flexible and proportionate account of the risks and challenges arising from the pandemic. However, it should also be noted that they are clear that whilst all employers are operating under demanding circumstances, compliance with occupational health and safety legal requirements remains with duty holders. The HSE will continue its regulatory oversight of how employers / duty holders are meeting their responsibilities in the context of the current public health risk.

Clearly the vast majority of employers will already have considered the issues raised by HSE but the clarity of the application of RIDDOR will be welcomed. In particular, of note to local councils providing social care services, the example of a ‘work-related exposure to coronavirus’ being that of a ‘health care professional who is diagnosed with COVID-19 after treating patients with COVID-19’ will highlight further the risks within social care settings and the need to protect those frontline workers providing personal care.

Further updates on all aspects of COVID-19 for local councils can be found on the [APSE COVID-19 web hub](#). You can also join our COVID-19 network to receive rapid response updates and join our WhatsApp groups for APSE member councils [using this link](#).

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