PLANNING TO RE-OPEN WORKPLACES DURING COVID-19: RETURNING TO WORK - A SHORT GUIDE

February 17, 2021

Guidance updated to reflect change in physical distancing

Who is this guidance aimed at?

This guidance is primarily aimed at all employers, but may also provide useful information for employees and the self-employed who work with or near other people. It aims to give guidance on reducing the risks from Covid-19 in the workplace as well as explaining how to talk to your employees about how they can help protect themselves and others from harm.

Other advice

This guide should be read alongside other advice for businesses published by the Government of Jersey (GoJ), available through:
https://www.gov.je/health/coronavirus/Pages/Index.aspx

This is regularly updated and it is therefore strongly recommended that you regularly check to see if any relevant information has been published.

Many other organisations and professional bodies are also providing sector-specific tools and resources to support businesses to work safely during the outbreak.

Assessing the risk

As an employer you have a general legal duty under the Health and Safety at Work (Jersey) Law 1989 (HSW Law) to assess the risks posed by Covid-19 and take all reasonably practicable steps to protect your staff and others from developing the disease whilst at work.

You must:

- review your work activities and identify what activities or work situations might cause transmission of the virus
- think about who could be at risk
- decide how likely it is that someone could be exposed
- take action to remove, or if that is not possible, reduce the risk

From this risk assessment you should develop a written plan that sets out in detail how you are going to minimise the risk of spread of Covid-19. This plan should be kept under regular review to ensure it remains effective as circumstances change, e.g. new GoJ guidelines are published, the restrictions imposed by Jersey's Safe Exit framework change, plans you had made prove difficult to implement in practice, the incidence of covid-19 in the Island changes etc.

Talk to your staff

- It is important that your staff have an opportunity to review and discuss the plan you have developed to minimise the risks to staff on their return to the workplace.
- Ideally these conversations should start before they return to work to make sure they know what they need to do to protect themselves and others, but also to provide reassurance that you are taking their health and well-being seriously.
- Further discussions should then be held soon after their return to make sure the controls are working and are being followed.

Where to start

The starting point should be deciding who needs to return to the workplace. If an employee can continue to work from home without detriment to themselves or the business, then they should continue to do so.

Particular care should be given to staff vulnerable to serious complications of Covid-19 or who lives in a household with somebody who is vulnerable. Such individuals may need additional mitigation to be in place to enable them to return to the workplace. In some cases medical advice may be needed to support these decisions.

It is acknowledged that as the Island moves through the Safe Exit Framework there will be increasing numbers of staff returning to the workplace but it is essential that public health guidance and sector-specific regulations on physical distancing and hygiene are strictly observed at all times.

You need to think about where and how your work is carried out, and consider if there are jobs and tasks that can be changed to reduce risk.

You also need to make sure you think about employees continuing to work from home by, for example, providing the necessary equipment for them to work safely and effectively,

and keeping in regular contact to make sure you discuss their well-being and help them to feel part of the workforce

Physical distancing

You need to think about the workplace and how you can organise it, and the work, to keep people 2m apart wherever possible.

This should include thinking about how and when people arrive and leave work, as well as during the day, to help avoid crowding, particularly if you only have one entry point. This may require staggering start times or shift patterns and/or introducing movement etiquette around the building including the use of lifts.

You should physically arrange the work areas to keep people 2m apart, including in rest areas. Marking areas with floor paint or tape can help people keep their distance.

Wherever possible avoid people working face-to-face, for example by working back-to-back or side-by-side.

Try and minimise movement around the premises by discouraging non-essential trips within the workplace, restricting access to small meeting rooms, and limiting the number of people in confined spaces such as kitchens, toilets and changing rooms.

Restrict the amount of people that rotate between jobs and equipment. For example, workstations should be assigned to an individual for the duration of their working shift, the sharing of portable tools between workers should be discouraged but if unavoidable, think about how the risks will be controlled, e.g. wearing of gloves which are disposed of after each use.

Where you cannot maintain 2m distance at all times, you firstly need to consider whether the activity needs to go ahead. If it is considered essential, you should ensure that this is kept to a minimum and consider assigning people to shift teams, i.e. making sure the same people work together and separately to other teams, to limit social interaction.

Provide signage around the workplace to remind and encourage people to respect and maintain 2m distancing. Appropriate posters can be downloaded free of charge from: https://www.gov.je/Health/Coronavirus/PublicHealthGuidance/Pages/CoronavirusFlyersAndPosters.aspx

Good hygiene

You should ensure that you have adequate handwashing facilities that provide hot and cold running water, liquid soap and paper towels. People should be able to wash their hands when they get to work and before they leave.

- Consider providing hand sanitiser (minimum 60% alcohol content) at access points, toilet facilities and at multiple locations throughout the premises, in addition to handwashing facilities
- Use signs to increase awareness, and encourage, good handwashing technique. Appropriate posters can be downloaded free of charge from www.gov.je
- Provide regular reminders on avoiding touching your face and to cough/ sneeze into the crook of your arm

Ensure that cleaning contracts and enhanced cleaning procedures have been put into place to maintain a high level of cleanliness and prevent transmission of Covid-19 by touching of contaminated surfaces. This may require an increased frequency of common touch points such as door handles, banisters, lift call buttons etc as well as objects and surfaces which are used by multiple people.

Set clear guidance for the use of rest areas, toilets and changing facilities to make sure they are kept clean and tidy.

Information and guidance

The Covid-19 outbreak has been a worrying time for everybody and it is important that employees feel supported and safe when asked to return to their workplace.

You need to think about how you will provide people, including employees and others, such as visitors, customers or contractors, with the information that they will need about the procedures and ways of working that have been introduced.

This information should be shared with employees before they return to work, who should be provided with an opportunity to discuss any concerns they may have. Think about how you will respond to any concerns that are raised.