

COVID-19 FAQs for Shops in England

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The full Working Safely guide can be accessed here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

The five key points of Working Safely are highlighted in blue, below. A list of FAQs is grouped under each of these points:

Returning to the workplace

“Employers should ensure workplaces are safe whilst also enabling working from home” (Government guidance)

1. **My shop is open now that lockdown rules have begun to ease. We are operating shorter hours with a skeleton staff and some of my workers are still working from home. What should I be doing for my home-working employees?**

- Make sure they have what they need – equipment that works as intended and is properly set up (see guidance on display screen equipment, here: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/workers/home.htm>)
- Do they know what they should be doing and can it be done safely?
- Are they lone working? This carries additional risk because there’s no help if needed. Your responsibilities extend to employees, self-employed people and freelancers who work for you. See <https://www.hse.gov.uk/lone-working/employer/manage-the-risks-of-working-alone.htm>
- Think about how you will keep in touch with them and how they will maintain contact with other colleagues – this is important not just for getting the work done and keeping up to date with any changes in the pipeline, but also for social reasons and mental health.

2. **We are hoping to open the shop for longer hours and start to bring more people back to work. How can I prepare for this?**

If returning to work sometime soon is likely, perhaps in a staged return, then how you care for and prepare your workers is a key guiding principle. These three tests are worth thinking about:

- is it essential? (working from home is still the default position)
- is it safe? (are all the risks at work now managed sufficiently?)
- is it agreed? (concerns about things like using public transport, or anxiety about catching the virus, or managing new working hours and arrangements might all be commonplace).

Workers who are ‘clinically extremely vulnerable’ may still wish to take extra care. See the latest guidance:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19#work-and-employment>

Others may be worried because they live with or care for someone who is ‘high risk.’ In this case, you should allow them to continue working from home. Remember that those who develop symptoms of COVID-19 (or who live with someone who does), will need to self-isolate.

Remember that not everyone suits or enjoys home working, especially given the length of time that COVID-19 home working has been going on. This could be for lots of reasons, such as working longer hours, having additional caring responsibilities, insufficient quiet space to concentrate or finding it difficult to cope with minimal social contact. Look out for signs of stress and provide an emergency point of contact (person) so anyone struggling can get help if needed.

3. **Are there other legal or employment-related things I should be doing?**

- In short, yes. Some of which will depend on whether staff have been furloughed so far and may continue to be, until October 2020.
- Short term working/redundancy - it’s a possibility that not all your workforce will be needed or for as much time as they are now. The CIPD website provides some useful tips on these matters:

<https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/emp-law/employees/workplace-guide-returning-after-coronavirus>

Assess the risk

“Carry out a COVID-19 risk assessment” (Government guidance)

1. **My shop is in a building with other shops. Who is responsible for carrying out the COVID-19 risk assessment?**

- The working environment dictates (to some extent) what actions are ultimately needed, but employers and self-employed people are still responsible for assessing the risks and managing them. Pragmatically, this means that you would work with other tenants and the landlord of your building to agree what’s needed and to share in publicising this with appropriate signage- especially in the common walkways and toilet areas and for queues at the main entrance to the building.

2. **Am I required to publish my COVID-19 risk assessment online?**

- You’re required to share the findings of it with your employees, which could be via an intranet communication. In COVID-19 circumstances, it’s a good idea to publish it more widely, via your website, so that customers and suppliers can have confidence in the measures you’ve put in place. The Government expects that larger businesses, with over 50 workers, will do just this.

3. **Can customers and delivery drivers use our toilets?**

- Toilet use will depend on the findings of your COVID-19 risk assessment, so each business will make its own decision having considered all the elements. If toilets are available for use, they must be

managed well (signage, queueing, cleaning etc.)

Stay 2m apart

"2m remains the goal for social distancing. But where this cannot be achieved, then apply 1m + risk mitigation measures if together this means the activity can carry on safely." (Government guidance)

1. **My shop is tiny - I'm going to find it difficult to achieve the 2m distancing requirement between myself and customers - what should I do?**

- The main body of this Retail Guide describe how to approach the task of risk assessment for COVID-19. If 2m distancing cannot be achieved (but the activity still needs to continue for the business to operate), then the other things you can do, are:
 - Work out how many customers you can reasonably fit in to achieve social distancing
 - Think about how you will manage this (signage, floor markings, extra cleaning, etc.)
- You could also implement:
 - Back-to-back or side-to-side working (not face-to-face)
 - Screens or barriers to separate people from each other (workers and/or customers)
 - Increase the frequency of handwashing (or hand sanitizer) and surface cleaning

If you cannot run your shop safely, then don't trade from it. Can you sell online or in other ways instead?

Remember - if you have two doors, use one as an entrance and the other as an exit. If you only have one door, the customer leaving the shop needs to be at a suitable distance from the queue of waiting customers.

2. **How can I ensure social distancing in a lift or at the till?**

- Signage outside the lift to remind those entering it
- Hand sanitizer station inside the lift, for use before/after pressing lift buttons
- For large lifts, clear and bold floor markings, showing where to stand
- For small lifts, limit their use to one person at a time, unless users are from the same household
- Put similar arrangements into place at tills and payment points.

If there's no space for an exclusion area like this at tills or paypoints (with signage to remind customers to follow it), then install a suitable sneeze screen barrier.

3. **What about waiting areas and changing rooms?**

- Tape up furniture to make it clear what's in use and what isn't
- for changing rooms, Government guidance states that 'fitting rooms should be closed wherever possible given the challenges in operating them safely.' However, some shops have chosen to allow the use of changing rooms by putting strict measures in place to ensure sufficient cleanliness between users. For example, Selfridges is implementing strict sanitation measures by steaming and sanitising fitting rooms between uses. To be able to do this with confidence, the findings of Selfridge's risk assessment must have demonstrated that these measures are sufficient. It is unlikely that a quick spray of disinfectant into the fitting room (and nothing more) would be enough.

Fitting assistance is covered in the Close Contact Services annex of Working Safely (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/close-contact-services#close-contact-5-4>)

The close proximity of fitter to customer, potentially in the 'highest risk zone' makes this a particular challenge and one which should be carefully risk assessed.

Stay separate

“Where it’s not possible for people to be 2m apart, do everything practical to manage the transmission risk” (Government guidance)

1. **Should I be providing gloves for my workers or to customers coming into the shop?**

- If you are already providing gloves to workers for other work-related reasons (as identified in your health and safety risk assessment), then continue to do so. Gloves are not recommended specifically for COVID-19 in normal circumstances because it’s better to wash hands properly and not touch the face. There’s a chance that the wearing of gloves instead may provide a false sense of security for the wearers and those they come into contact with.

2. **Do I need to check people’s temperatures - employees or visitors or customers?**

- No. Not at the moment. The Government is looking at the evidence for doing this. Anyone showing symptoms of the virus (which include a high temperature) or who share a home with anyone isolating, should stay at home.

3. **How big do barrier or sneeze screens need to be?**

- this depends on the activity they’re protecting. Generally, ‘sneeze screens’ should be sufficiently wide and tall to be effective. They might have a gap at low level for transactions. A 1m x 1m screen is a popular size. An example of one is shown in Pic 3. Remember to include regular cleaning of screens in your cleaning schedule.

Keep cleaning

“Keep the workplace clean and prevent transmission by touching contaminated surfaces” (Government guidance)

1. **Can I accept returned goods from customers, given that the goods and packaging will have been touched by them?**

Yes, providing you put new arrangements in place to protect your workers accepting the goods and any future customer who might buy them. This includes things like:

- Storing items that have been returned for 48 hours (this used to be 72 hours) so that the virus naturally dies off)
- Depending on the item, cleaning it appropriately before putting it back on display
- For items like beds or furniture, where customers inevitably want to touch them, use coverings which will withstand cleaning afterwards
- Accept returned goods only at designated areas so the process can be managed properly

2. **Can I refund in cash, or only contactless?**

‘Where possible’ refunds should be contactless. But if this isn’t possible, refund in another way, cleaning any devices used with sanitiser between customers

Remember - contactless payment is now possible up to £45. You could put a sign up at the till to remind customers of this and encourage payment in this way.

3. **Cleaning is clearly a big part of our ‘new normal’ way of operating. How do I know that my cleaning equipment is up to the job?**

- A professional who can take a swab of your services will tell you for sure. But this isn’t necessary

providing you use cleaning and disinfection products that are suitable for the job and follow the manufacturer's instructions. This will usually mean cleaning hard surfaces with warm, soapy water followed by disinfectant. Check that your disinfectant combats viruses, including human coronaviruses and if there's a required 'contact time' (i.e. how long to leave it on the surface before wiping off). Always buy a reputable brand from a reputable supplier - there are some which are not up to the job, despite claiming that they are!

- More specialist cleaning in a non-healthcare setting after someone with suspected COVID-19 has left, is described in this Government guidance:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings>
- Remember to focus on what you clean as well as how to clean it and how often. Frequent touch areas are door handles, light switches, payment devices as well as sneeze screens etc.

The science bit:

Detergents: soap - these clean the surface and remove grease and help to break down the virus structure

Sanitisers: alcohol based (above 60%) - break down the virus structure and reduce the amount of microbes present which can help to reduce the risk of infection

Disinfectants: e.g. Dettol, household bleach (at the right dilution) - they destroy bacteria and viruses if used on a visibly clean surface and left for the required contact time before wiping

What about antibacterial sprays? Many of these marketed as antibacterial may not work against a virus like COVID-19, unless they contain at least 60% alcohol or a comparable agent which will do the same and this is stated on the label.

Signage

Some useful signage for a shop environment, kindly provided by the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, is here:

Limiting the number of customers entering the shop:

https://www.cieh.org/media/4183/covid-19-poster_1.pdf

Maintaining 2m distance when queuing outside and in the shop:

https://www.cieh.org/media/4181/covid-19-poster_2.pdf

Keeping a 2m distance at all times:

https://www.cieh.org/media/4182/covid-19-poster_3.pdf

Please email us and let us know: covidadvice@tsi.org.uk

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