



COVID-19

Q&A

CORONAVIRUS

A free guide from Citation's
Health & Safety experts

Citation

COVID -19: Health & Safety best practice when managing the risks across your staff and workplace

Businesses are understandably concerned about the steps they should be taking to manage the risk of the spread of COVID-19 caused by the coronavirus and this gives rise to a number of questions around the safety of employees and others who come into contact with the business, what practical steps can be taken to reduce the spread of infection and how to implement a business continuity plan especially if the business doesn't already have one.

This is a rapidly developing situation and we are seeking to provide re-assurance on certain HR and health and safety aspects as well as reinforcing official government and medical guidance.

Here are our top 10 health and safety related questions that our clients are asking us:

1. *“Does Citation have a risk assessment for Coronavirus?”*

An example risk assessment has been created in Atlas which is being regularly reviewed and updated. This can be amended and approved to reflect your business for distribution to employees.

2. *“Does Citation have a policy template for us to use on Coronavirus?”*

Infection control arrangements form part of a Citation client's Health & Safety Policy. A separate policy isn't needed but it is relevant to review and update procedures and keep a record of any risk assessments or business continuity plans relating to Coronavirus. An example risk assessment and business continuity plan template are available on Atlas.

3. *“Shall I ask employees to keep a record of where they've been and who they've met with?”*

There's no need to document employees' whereabouts to this level of detail if you have remote or lone workers and already have measures in place to record details and locations of where they are working. Give re-assurance to employees that they can come forward to raise any concerns about their exposure to the virus whilst at work just as would be the case if they had any other health and safety concern. If a diagnosed case of COVID-19 is reported, Public Health England will carry out contact tracing.

4. *“We have employees who travel abroad for work – what should we do?”*

The first step is to review travel plans in terms of what is essential and what isn't especially if it involves travel to an affected area. Eliminate the risk as far as it is reasonable and consider whether trips need to be cancelled or rescheduled.

For unavoidable travel for work, as an employer, you have a duty to assess the risks of travelling and working in other countries, regardless of whether there is an acute situation as is the case with COVID-19, currently. Travel plans should always consider personal safety and security and health guidelines for the destination of travel. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office publish up to date travel advice and this should be regularly checked in relation to COVID-19.

Communicate to all your employees regularly regarding travel risks, the consequences of travelling to an 'at risk' area and how the company would propose to deal with a period of self-isolation in these circumstances.

5. *“What hygiene and infection control procedures should I have in place?”*

It would be sensible to review your current hygiene practices to make sure that you are taking all reasonable steps to reduce the risk of people spreading illness at work. This will include reminding staff that they should:

- Cover their mouth and nose with a tissue or their sleeve (not their hands) when they cough or sneeze
- Put used tissues in the bin immediately
- Wash hands with soap and water often (or sanitizer gel where this is not available)
- Avoid close contact with unwell people
- Avoid touching their eyes, nose or mouth with their hands if they are unclean

You may also want to step up cleaning practices within the business and supply additional hand sanitizers. If you work with people considered to be at heightened risk of COVID-19, consider plans for deep cleaning premises.

Remember to review and update COSHH assessments if any new hazardous substances are purchased. Use the Atlas COSHH assessment tool or contact our health and safety team for advice on this.

6. *“Should we supply masks to employees?”*

There’s been an increase in the number of people wearing disposable masks around the world, particularly in China where the outbreak began and this leads the public in general to wonder if they should be doing the same even if the threat level is lower where they live. In the majority of workplaces, face masks are not necessary. According to Public Health England, there’s little evidence of widespread benefit from their use outside of a clinical setting such as hospitals.

The best way to reduce the spread of infections like coronavirus is to wash hands frequently with soap and water or use a sanitiser gel, as well as always carrying tissues and using them to catch coughs and sneezes, putting the tissue in a bin.

The World Health Organization’s advice on wearing masks states masks are only required if you are taking care of a person with suspected COVID-19.

7. *“Can the virus survive on a cargo that has arrived from an infected area?”*

There is currently no evidence to suggest that the virus can be transmitted from post, packages or parcels.

8. *“We have employees who can work from home – what do I need to do?”*

The number of new measures required will depend on whether the employees already work from home or have never worked from home before. Start with an assessment of their ability to work safely considering whether they have a suitable workstation and equipment as well as a means of communication such as a work mobile. Having up to date contact details and a communication plan is also required. See Atlas factsheet on Display Screen Equipment for more information or contact a health and safety adviser.

9. ***“An employee/ customer/ supplier with a confirmed case of COVID-19 has recently been in the workplace. What should I do?”***

Current government advice is that closure of the workplace in these circumstances is **not** recommended. In cases of confirmed cases of COVID-19, Public Health England’s local protection team will be in contact with the employer to discuss the case, find out who has been in contact with the individual and advise on actions which should be taken including any quarantine arrangements which may be necessary and cleaning of communal areas which may need to be undertaken.

10. ***“An employee/ customer/ supplier with an unconfirmed case of COVID-19 has recently been in the workplace. What should I do? “***

Government guidance at the moment is that there is no need to do anything while test results are pending. Most tests come back negative and therefore no action needs to be taken while a case is unconfirmed.