

Preparing for the

New Normal

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Overview

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With the coronavirus curve beginning to flatten in the UK, the government has begun to slowly relax restrictions. Those who work in jobs that cannot be done from the home were asked, on the 11th May, to return to work by the government. It is likely that in the coming weeks more and more workplaces will begin to open back up and that normality will begin to resume. However, the coronavirus is still a public health crisis, and upon a return to the workplace, serious health and safety considerations must take place.

Whilst your organisations cannot ensure the safety of staff and volunteers on their commutes to work, or outside of the workplace, it is important that they do all that they can to ensure a safe working environment within the office, shop, or any other work set-up your organisation has.

This guide has been put together to help your organisation begin to prepare for a return to the workplace. MCF is not responsible for whether you do or do not follow the advice within these guides. This advice is general, and your organisation may have specific need/issues that need to be addressed depending on the size of your offices, geography, staff size and so on.

Travelling to work

Ultimately, employers do not have the power to ensure that all commutes to the place of work are safe. The employee decides on the way that they commute, and is ultimately the only one who is responsible for the safety precautions that they take on these journeys. With this said, there are some practical measures that workplaces can take that can help to minimise the risk to staff who have to commute to work, particularly via public transport.

Flexible working hours

In many cities and towns across the UK, enforcing social distancing at peak travelling times is simply not possible, therefore, we encourage employers to explore the use of flexible working hours that allow for their employees to commute outside of peak time periods.

Provide guidance and resources for commuting staff

We encourage organisations to provide guidelines for staff on how they can best protect themselves during their commute, this may include basic tips such as the washing of hands before and after travelling, and the maintaining of social distance, where possible, on public transport.

It is important employers also recognise that the wearing of masks on public transport will be mandatory from the 15th June until further notice. Staff may struggle to acquire this protection at a fair and reasonable price. Your organisation should consider ways to lift this burden, perhaps by looking at ways of purchasing masks in bulk and providing them to staff for free, or selling them at their reduced bulk price point.

Explore the use of car-pooling and ride-sharing schemes in your workplace

Some workplaces already have employee car-pooling and ride-sharing schemes in action as part of an attempt to both reduce the costs of employees commuting to work, but also to foster positive change in reducing emissions and protecting the environment. Encouraging ride-sharing may be an effective way of reducing exposure to the virus and also in fostering greater collaboration and team spirit amongst staff. This option may be more difficult to provide in larger cities, unless staff are able to match with other staff who live nearby to them and who have access to a vehicle. It is important to stress that safety precautions must still be taken such as the wearing of masks. The risk of transmission remains even if this risk is less than if staff were using public transport during peak times.



At the workplace: General Guidelines

Risk Assessment

Prior to staff and volunteers returning to work, it is important that your organisation conducts thorough risk assessments to ensure that conditions for employees are as safe as possible. Your organisations trustees should have a central role in reviewing and assessing the risks of returning to work.

Cleanliness and hygiene

Regardless of the working environment, organisations and employers need to take extra measures to maintain cleanliness and hygiene. This will differ depending on the workplace, but employers have a duty to ensure access to hand-sanitiser dispensers, and to alter work environments to reduce the spread of germs and make cleaning of surfaces easier and more regular.

Social Distancing

Adopting social distancing measures reduces the risk of the transmission of COVID-19. As such, employers should work towards ensuring social distancing can be adhered to as much as possible. For different workplaces, different solutions need to be used.

Common areas

Common areas are locations in the workplace where there are higher risks of transmission due to the greater number of people utilising the space, whether at one time or throughout the day. As such, these areas need to be regularly cleaned and plans need to be put in place to manage to number of people using the space at any one time. In Muslim organisations, this includes share kitchen/dining spaces, bathrooms, but also prayer spaces.

Shielding

The utmost care needs to be taking for all staff members, but in particular those who are vulnerable, shielding or having to shield family members. It is important that organisations do what they can to help employees to work from home, and if this cannot be done, ensure they are not unfairly penalised due to this.

Bereavement

COVID-19 has been traumatic and devastating for communities in the UK and globally. Employers should be conscious of this and provide as much support and flexibility as possible to grieving staff members. Many who have lost loved ones have been unable to mourn as they would have done in other circumstances. Being unable to see extended family, attend funerals and so on and so forth, will likely have extended the period of grieving and made it more difficult for people to process the loss of their loved ones.

At the workplace: Office Guidelines

Office spaces are one of the most common working formats, but they also hold a lot of risks in the age of COVID-19. There are a number of ways that organisations and employers can make their offices safer for employees and volunteers. Where possible, organisations should consider the following:

Flexible working hours

Flexible working hours are beneficial for a number of reasons and there has been a gradual movement to greater work flexibility even prior to coronavirus. During this public health crisis, it is essential that greater flexibility is offered to staff. This may include allowing staff to work more regularly from home, or flexibility in when the working day starts to avoid public transport as peak times.

Safer workplace planning

Offices are designed to maximise work station space which often means that employees work in very close proximity to one another. Work stations and the office floor-plan need to be redesigned to limit the spread of COVID-19. This may be difficult for offices that already lack space, but when coupled with more flexi work options, many logistical problems can be resolved.

Half in, half out

'Half in, half out' relates to the idea of employees working half of the week from home, and half in the office. The workforce would be split into two, with one group in the office whilst the other group works from home. With this format, issues of work space and social distancing are reduced as the space only needs to cater for half of the workforce. Any essential staff who cannot work from home would be able to effectively work from the office without exposing themselves to extra risk.

Hygiene and cleanliness

As stated earlier, we are living in a public health crisis and maintaining hygiene and cleanliness is a matter of life and death, and could lead to the reduction in the spread of COVID-19 within the workplace. As such, preserving cleanliness in the office is a necessity, this includes regular cleaning of desks, communal areas, elevator buttons, and more.



At the workplace: Shop Work Guidelines

Many Muslim charitable organisations operate charity shops and these form a fundamental avenue of income for the organisation and their life-changing projects. As shops begin to reopen, charities need to take steps to ensuring the safety of their employees, volunteers and customers. The following are just some of the ways to promote safety:

Till partitions

Staff working in shops are more likely to be within two metres of another person, particularly those working behind the till and working in public facing roles. One effective way to minimise risk of catching the virus is to install a thin transparent partition between the customer and the cashier.

Reorganise shop floor space

The way in which your charity reorganises the shop floor will depend on the size and set up already in existence. However, a one way traffic flow system through the shop will help to ensure that people can move effectively through the store without compromising social distancing. Floor marking near the till areas displaying 2 metre distance will also ensure that customers can more easily adhere to social distancing.

Limit customer numbers

Limiting the number of customers allowed into the shop at any one time is an effective way to manage social distancing on the shop floor.

Cleanliness and hygiene

As stated earlier, cleanliness and hygiene is essential. Pin pads should be cleaned regularly, contactless card payments should be encouraged when possible, and other store surfaces should be cleaned as regularly as possible. It would also be beneficial to install hand sanitisers in the entry way of the shop.

At the workplace: Shop Work Guidelines

Staff pairing system

Shop staff are likely to work in close proximity to each other, unable to effectively socially distance. A staff pairing system can help limit the mixing of different staff members by ensuring that those who have worked in close proximity continue to work the same shifts, and other shifts are worked by a group of colleagues who also only work shifts with people within that group.

Develop new system for donation drop offs

Many have taken use of the extra time that the lockdown has provided in order to clear out their closets and donate unwanted items to charity. If charity shops closed many have been unable to donate these items as of yet. It is believed that when charity shops open there will be a surge in donation drop offs that may overwhelm shops. Consider developing a new system to manage and limit these drop offs.



At the workplace: Fieldwork Guidelines

With or without COVID-19, charities are working diligently across the world to help to lift the difficulties facing the world's most vulnerable communities. They do life saving and life changing work - but in the age of COVID-19, there is, inevitably, increased complexity, difficulty and risks involved in fieldwork. The following are some ways to decrease risk:

Working collaboratively

Many charities are doing incredible work, sometimes working in the same areas on similar projects. COVID-19 has been disruptive in all aspects of life, including in charity fieldwork. Where possible, we encourage charities to consider how they can work collaboratively to minimise risk and costs, and maximise effectiveness and reach.

Providing guidelines and regular updates specific to the country that the fieldwork is taking place in

Each country is affected by COVID-19 in different ways and to varying extents, organisations should provide support for staff that reflects the laws and guidance of the country and region they are working in. It is important that staff are kept regularly up to date with changes and new news and information.

Project continuity planning

Ultimately, charities do not know what the next couple of years will look like and whether second, third or more waves of COVID-19 are around the corner. As such, it is important that organisations develop project continuity plans and consider these issues when developing projects in the future.

Staff safety, social distancing and hygiene

As per general advice, maintaining high hygiene standards and practicing social distancing is essential and remains important in the field, especially when working with vulnerable communities. Protection of fieldwork teams is a priority.

Regular risk assessments

Fieldwork is constantly changing, unlike the office or shop environment. It is therefore very important that charities conduct regular risk assessments ensuring that the risk of the spread of COVID-19 is considered.