

Introduction

This document aims to outline the current considerations with respect to the virus currently circulating and the disease presented by it. Over the course of 2020, a better understanding of the SARS-CoV2 virus and how it is transmitted to cause the disease of Covid19 has been discovered and includes variants that are more highly transmissible than previously. There is still much to learn and it is important that measures are taken to minimise the further spread of the virus.

At the time of writing, the incidence of the disease has increased leading to more stringent measures from central government to attempt to control transmission. Government has suggested that where possible, people should continue to work from home where possible, but that it is possible to return to work where appropriate precautions are in place to make a workplace 'Covid Secure'. Plans released towards the end of February have outlined a variety of steps moving forward with the hope that many activities could return in the summer.

The aim of this document is to help provide a Covid-secure working environment for staff undertaking the work.

About the Virus

Risks of transmission of the virus are either through aerosol droplets exhaled from an infected person or via surfaces that have deposits of active viral particles.

Direct aerosol transmission can occur between persons in close proximity and the degree of viral load transmitted from an infected person can vary depending on duration of contact and proximity of contact. This is the principle behind social distancing and use of face coverings. It is currently believed that this route is the primary cause of transmission and infection.

Transmission via surfaces may occur if a person touches a contaminated surface and then touches their face (mouth, nose or eyes). Infection does not occur through the skin but rather uses the skin as a means of transfer to an environment more amenable to allowing it to proliferate. This is the principle behind personal hygiene precautions of regular handwashing and use of alcohol based handgels.

The effect of virus on individuals appears considerably greater in persons with pre-existing health conditions and the elderly in particular. This is not to say that youth and health are a guarantee of not being affected or being able to transmit the disease further.

Efforts are now being made to roll out a vaccine that can reduce or eliminate the effects of the virus on an individual and while tests have shown some degree of immunity is achieved it is not 100% certain and evidence suggests that vaccinated individuals are still able to transmit the virus to others.

The increased prevalence of variants of the virus are still the cause of some concern until further research has been undertaken, but it is accepted that transmission via the aerosol route is the main concern. For this reason, increased emphasis is being placed on the improvement of ventilation in the workplace with high speed extraction and low level in-flow being most effective at providing sufficient air changes in a building. It is likely that outdoor activities are a much lower risk especially where other mitigation such as maintaining distancing and use of face coverings is employed.

Basic Actions to Achieve 'Covid Secure'

- It is a requirement to undertake a risk assessment and share this with staff on processes and procedures necessary to reduce the risk to the lowest achievable level.
- It is necessary for this assessment to be communicated with others who may enter the workplace including client groups, volunteer staff or working parties, delivery and collection personnel.
- Wherever possible, work from home. The nature of this activity precludes the possibility that it be conducted from home or via other remote means.
- Locations or premises operators shall need to carry out such cleaning and maintenance as is necessary to reduce the likelihood of viral particles remaining viable on surfaces and equipment.
- Facilities for handwashing or hand hygiene need to be in place for staff and visitors.
- Arrangements to allow for appropriate distancing need to be in place.
- Suggestions as to use of PPE where distancing measures or other measures are not possible or practical.
- Continuous review and updating with relevance to dynamic nature of government, local authority and PHE guidance and advice.
- Work should be conducted outdoor or in well ventilated spaces as far as possible to reduce transmission of more virulent strains of the virus.

General Considerations

All staff, and visitors are required to monitor their own general health and circumstances before committing to either working or attending the workplace. This may include consideration of the health or vulnerability of members of their household and family.

No one should attend the workplace if:

- They are currently experiencing symptoms common to Covid19 (temperature, cough, loss of taste or smell etc)
- They, or anyone in their family has had symptoms or had a positive test in the last 14 days
- They have been contacted by the official Test Trace Isolate Service
- They are required to quarantine following a visit to an overseas territory not currently on the 'safe travel corridor' list
- They are identified as clinically vulnerable due to a pre-existing health condition

In all the above cases, they should isolate as necessary and not attend the workplace.

If any person working experiences any symptoms prior to attending the site, they need to let their supervisor know as soon as possible in order that replacement staff can be sourced in good time if necessary.

If any staff start to experience symptoms whilst at the workplace, they should immediately isolate themselves from other workers, inform their supervisor (or ask someone else to do so) and leave the premises as soon as possible.

All staff should ensure that guidance and instruction on personal hygiene, social distancing and use of face coverings is followed.

On arrival at site staff shall check-in to register their presence and confirm their current state of health. A site induction provided by location management will follow outlining Covid procedures, and general safe working procedures. A QR code for the NHS Track and Trace check-in process will be available for those persons participating to 'check-in' and use.

Covid19 briefings will include

- Hand hygiene instructions, requirements for distancing and use of PPE including face coverings/masks
- Use of toilets and sanitary facilities including location of hand sanitiser stations
- Access to first aid or emergency arrangements
- Access to rest and other welfare facilities including any arrangements for breaks, catering etc
- Procedures for manual handling tasks to reduce close contact work such as 'cohorting'
- Arrangements to be in place for cleaning of equipment, maintaining a tidy workplace etc.

It shall be a requirement that all staff use a personal face covering or mask at all times indoor or in enclosed spaces with the exception of when eating or drinking when distancing of 2m will be required as a minimum. Disposable face coverings and masks shall be available. Persons exempt from use of face coverings for medical reasons should not work.

Hand sanitiser stations shall be available throughout the location but particularly at the main entrance to the site, entry points into enclosed spaces, in staff rest areas and offices, and similar environments.

Anti-viral wipes or cleaning materials will be available to allow users to wipe down surfaces before and after use.

It is preferred that working teams are sub-divided into smaller working 'cohorts' of no more than 4 persons to minimise transmission to wider teams. These cohorts should work consistently with each other and means that occasional close contact work such as manual handling would be achievable. Cohorts should avoid mixing with others including during rest breaks.

All personnel are required to maintain 2m distancing from others as far as possible. Work within 2m must be as short duration as practical and with use of a face covering and avoiding face-to-face contact.

All work onsite shall be monitored by location management to ensure that Covid19 procedures are being followed as far as is reasonably practicable.

All users of toilets and shared spaces requested to sanitise hands before use and to wash hands after use.

Clear and plentiful signage should be installed to provide information on distancing requirements, one way routes, and other key information alongside sanitisation stations on entry points and various convenient locations around the working areas.

Personnel should use hand sanitiser before and after using any shared equipment such as work equipment and tools.

At the end of each working day staff will be asked to check out with their supervisor. This will be an opportunity to express any comments or suggestions on improvements to be fed back to the management team.

External contractors shall provide full risk assessments for their own operations and include any specific Covid19 procedures. It should outline arrangements for preventing transmission between their own teams such as 'cohorting', staff welfare, staff hygiene, and provision of appropriate PPE

They shall be required to provide a full list of staff (including mobile numbers for direct comms) at least 24 hours prior to attending site and register their vehicles. It is important that all personnel are included to be able to implement any specific tracing that could be undertaken at a later date if necessary.