

Health and Safety Briefing

Healthy Office Spaces

Introduction

With employers considering re-opening offices, it is essential that these spaces are made safer. This involves reviewing:

- The layout of the office workspace
- The use of facilities
- Working practices

The following guidance sets out some of the measures that members can ask employers to implement concerning their workplace prior to returning to an office environment. Our Health and Safety Briefing sets out what can be done if members have concerns that they face a risk of infection.

The most important of all measures is to insist that employers establish reliable routes of communication for employees to report concerns or suggestions relating to infection controls, and that they have an effective system for ensuring these are recorded, monitored, and addressed. Action taken in response to issues raised should be reported to staff. These systems need to be clearly communicated to all staff.

Unite representatives should be involved wherever they are present.

The Layout of the Office Workspace

- Reconfigure seating, furniture and workstations as needed to preserve recommended physical distancing.
- Reconfigure workstations so that employees do not face each other.
- Establish partitions to minimise proximity between staff in the offices and to create 'pods' in staff and common rooms.
- Discourage waiting areas for visitors. Ensure that staff are available to collect their guests from the entrance as soon as they arrive.
- Install a plastic partition at the reception area.
- Provide single direction pathways through the office and signage to help maintain social distancing.
- Ensure all offices are deep cleaned on a regular basis.
- Ensure hand sanitiser and sanitary wipes are easily accessible, and must always be available wherever staff need to touch handles, including those for storage facilities and filing cabinets.

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- Provide paper towels and plenty of waste bins for disposing of used sanitary wipes. These should be emptied regularly.
- Desks and other surfaces should be cleared at the end of each day to facilitate deep cleaning.
- Review the adequacy of the ventilation system to maximise the flow of fresh air.
- Encourage windows to be kept open while the office is in use to increase the levels of fresh air.

The Use of Facilities

- Replace amenities that are handled with high contact frequency, such as water coolers, coffee makers, and bulk snacks and replace them with alternatives. Examples include touchless sensor water dispensers and encouraging staff to bring in their own water bottles, cutlery and crockery.
- For any amenities that can't be replaced, such as vending machines, provide disinfectants to wipe down after each use.
- In the toilets, provide paper towels for hand drying and regularly emptied bins. Disconnect or tape-off hand air dryers.

Working Practices

- Reduce tasks requiring large amounts of people to be in one area.
- Promote the use of virtual meeting tools, including phone and video conferencing instead of in-person meetings, whenever possible.
- If in-person meetings are essential, consider limiting meetings to the smallest number of people necessary.
- Disinfectant wipes or spray should be left in each meeting room and employees should be encouraged to wipe down all surfaces and equipment before and after the meeting.
- Encourage a rota of staggered lunch breaks to reduce peaks.
- Encourage staff to bring in their meals and snacks rather than buying them locally.
- Facilitate working from home as an alternative to using the office.



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- Stagger start and finish times to avoid peak travel times.
- Employers should establish reliable routes of communication for employees to report concerns or suggestions relating to infection controls, and that they have an effective system for ensuring these are recorded, monitored, and addressed. Action taken in response to issues raised should be reported to staff. These systems need to be clearly communicated to all staff.
- Unite representatives should be involved wherever they are present.