

GUIDANCE ON WORKING FROM HOME DURING CORONAVIRUS

We understand that the continued Government restrictions relating to Coronavirus have meant new ways of working and new ways to manage employees. To help during these challenging times, we've summarised the points you may wish to consider, in order to help you and your employees to continue to work safely. However, as we have not been able to visit your premises, we are unable to make explicit recommendations.

As an employer you have the same health and safety responsibilities for home workers as you do for any other worker. Although it's always preferable to establish clear home working policies and training in advance, in times of crises or other rapidly changing circumstances, this level of preparation may not be feasible.

Fortunately, there are some simple steps that managers can take that will allow them to effectively manage home workers, even when there is little time to prepare.

To help, we've put together the following guidance listing the things you need to consider:

- Conduct risk assessments at the start of the home working arrangement and periodically thereafter
- Ensure professional advice is available when necessary
- Ensure working limits are defined, for example working hours, breaks etc.

RISK ASSESSMENT

This does not need to be an onerous task and could mean just a conversation with the individual. The following elements should be considered as part of your home worker risk assessment:

- Stress and mental wellbeing
- Fire Safety / Electrical Safety
- Slips and trips
- Display Screen Equipment
- Lone working



To help you get started, here's some further guidance on what should be reviewed and possible control measures that could be put in place, to reduce the risk of things going wrong:

STRESS AND MENTAL WELLBEING

Home working can cause work-related stress and affect people's mental health. Being away from managers and colleagues can make it difficult for people to get proper support.

To reduce the likelihood of this happening, try and make sure the following is in place:

- Regular communication - set up sessions to talk to your employees – daily calls, 1-2-1 calls and if possible / applicable a weekly team call.
- Communication options - if possible, look at alternatives to email and telephone, such as video conferencing, this could help to reduce the sense of isolation amongst individuals and allows you to look out for visual clues to identify if someone is struggling.
- Don't just talk about work - spend some time at the start of calls talking about non-work items or plan a virtual event, like a quiz, where the team can have a laugh and unwind together.
- Provide encouragement and emotional support - it's important for managers to acknowledge stress, listen to employees' anxieties and concerns, and empathise with their struggles. Ask them "how are you doing" or "how are you finding working from home?" as you might receive a response that you would not otherwise hear.
- Make sure that they have an emergency point of contact - and if you can, let your employees know the best way and time to reach you during the workday.
- Set clear performance targets / expectations - this allows them to know what is expected of them.
- Establish a routine - encourage the keeping of regular hours where possible, as most people respond well to some form of routine and this will help separate work and home life.

- Flexibility and understanding - in the current circumstances it's unlikely that home workers have both a dedicated workspace and adequate childcare in place. One of the things that managers could do to ease the stress of their employees having to juggle this balance is to offer flexible working hours.
- It's also important to encourage employees to introduce exercise as part of their daily routine.

FIRE SAFETY / ELECTRICAL SAFETY

When supplying employees with equipment or allowing them to use their own, you must make sure that it's suitable for the job to be done. If it's not, then they'll need to be provided with information/training, so that they can do their job properly and safely and without unnecessary frustration or anxiety.

They'll also need to check the equipment is in a good condition and could not cause harm to anyone, for example no frayed / broken cables, evidence of damage or missing covers. Make sure that they are aware that the overuse of extension cables should be avoided, especially using extension leads in a "daisy chain", as this can cause an increased risk of fire in the home.

Agree with the home worker what 'at-home' technical support will be provided, (where applicable), in the case of equipment breakdown.

SLIPS AND TRIPS

Although it's difficult to dictate to home workers how they should live in their own home, it's important to discuss the suitability of their home environment e.g. access and egress, sufficient space for furniture, any areas where they may trip over new electrical cables as a result of the home working arrangements.

Advise home workers to do a quick review of where new slip or trip hazards may have been introduced as a result of the new home working arrangements.

DISPLAY SCREEN EQUIPMENT

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have determined there is no increased risk from display screen equipment (DSE) for those working at home temporarily. Employers therefore do not need to complete home workstation assessments. However, where you have employees working from home on a long-term basis due to the pandemic, then the risks associated with using DSE must be controlled and a formal workstation risk assessment must be completed.

You may wish to share the following advice with your employees:

- If you can, set up a dedicated and comfortable workstation
- Break up the day with rest breaks (at least 5 minutes every hour). Mini breaks throughout the day, whether it's taking a walk outside or a few minutes to breathe, can energise your muscles and mind and reduce tension
- Avoid awkward, static postures by regularly changing position
- Get up and move or do stretching exercises
- Avoid eye fatigue by changing focus or blinking from time to time. For every 20 minutes you spend looking at your screen, look at something 20 feet away, for 20 seconds
- Make sure your working area is well-lit.

If you do determine that completing a workstation assessment is essential, e.g. because the home working arrangement is no longer considered temporary or the individual has a pre-existing condition that could be affected by the change in working conditions, you can ask them to complete a self-assessment. A practical workstation self-assessment is available on the HSE website.

If an individual requires specialised DSE equipment you should try to meet those needs where possible. For some equipment (e.g. keyboards, mouse, riser) this could mean allowing workers to take this equipment home from their former workplace. For other larger items (e.g. ergonomic chairs, height-adjustable desks) encourage workers to try other ways of creating a comfortable working environment (e.g. supporting cushions). However, if the assessment identifies the need for specific equipment, the employer must provide these for the individual.

LONE WORKING

Keep in touch with home workers who are on their own and ensure regular contact to make sure they're safe. It's easy for workers to feel disconnected, isolated or abandoned if communication is poor. This can affect stress levels and mental health.

Ensure home workers have adequate means of summoning help in the event of an emergency.

USEFUL SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The Health and Safety Executive website contains a lot of useful information on working from home, for further information visit:

[HSE website – Protect home workers](#)

In addition to this, we also have guidance on a range of risk management matters on the NFU Mutual website. For further information visit nfumutual.co.uk/RMS

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This guidance is provided on the strict understanding that you accept, without limitation, that you retain sole responsibility for compliance with health and safety legislation and regulations, all other legislation and any warranties/conditions attached to your insurance policies. We have not conducted any site visits as part of producing this guidance and we have not, and are not, providing any guidance in relation to your specific set up.

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