

Returning to Work with COVID19

A Framework for continuity and recovery of business

Mary Finn, Connect4Work

May 2020



Table of Contents

Contents

Introduction	3
Disclaimer.....	4
Glossary.....	4
What we know so far about COVID19.	5
Communications	6
Review Policies and Guidelines.....	7
Communication of changes to workplace Policies and Practices	7
Develop a COVID19 Response Plan.....	8
Appoint a Designated person for COVID19 queries.....	11
Induction Training	12
Health and Safety Documentation.....	14
On-going risks associated with COVID19 and Safety measures	14
First Aid	14
Preventing contamination	15
Masks (Face Coverings).....	16
What to do if there is a suspected or a confirmed case of COVID19 in the Workplace	16
Cleaning Considerations	20
Legionella	20
Physical distancing – is this possible in work?	21
Managing meetings.....	21
Safety Considerations for Staff	22
Mental Health of Staff.....	24
Travelling for work	25
Safety Considerations for Suppliers / Contractors / On-site Visitors.....	25
Safety Considerations for Customers	26
Resources and Further Reading	28
Occupational Health and Safety Helpline	28
Appendices.....	30
Appendix A: Pre-Return to work questionnaire.....	30
Appendix B – Visitor Access Process	31

Introduction

Change might be hard, but uncertainty is often worse.

During this time of crisis, people are feeling overwhelmed, worried about the future and feel out of control. Now is the time for you to take control and turn the “what if we can’t...” conversations you may be having in your mind into “What if we do this”

Following this framework for a planned return to work is the first step to getting organised.

Connect4Work has produced this document to support organisations plan for the return to work once the current COVID19 restrictions have been relaxed and businesses are allowed to open again. It is understood that the virus will remain as a health risk for some time to come - this document has been designed to help address this risk and consider to how best protect your business and all that come into contact with your premises – your employees, contractors, suppliers, customers and visitors etc.

Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 and General Application Regulations provisions across all sectors still apply and must not be compromised in any way at this time.

Adherence to revised guidelines published by Government Departments is also necessary to continue to suppress the spread of the virus.

If an activity cannot be undertaken safely, it should not take place.

Mary Finn, Connect4Work

April 2020

Disclaimer.

This framework is intended for information purposes and used by organisations to consider what actions might need to be undertaken in planning a return to work under COVID19 restrictions.

This is not a legal document, it will not supercede legislative regulations or updates as published by Government departments on the evolving situation and health risks posed by COVID19.

This document does not give or advise on any legal or medical issues.

This is not an exhaustive list and is not intended to replace any sector or site-specific health and safety guidelines or policies that may be in place.

Any person using this framework is advised to carry out full risk assessments particular to their own work site in order to ensure compliance with any legal requirements in respect of health, safety and welfare at work in advance of any planned return to work.

In compiling this document, information has been drawn from a number of resources and already published documents which are referenced in the *Resources and Further Reading* **Error! Reference source not found.** section at the end of this Framework. Connect4Work does not accept any liability that this guidance will ensure full compliance with the latest regulations and all workplaces are advised to familiarise themselves with the Return to Work Safely Protocol and any sector specific protocols relevant to their industry.

Glossary

COVID19 – Corona Virus Disease relating to its outbreak in 2019 also known as the Corona Virus

DBEI - Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation

HSA – Health and Safety Authority

HSE – Health Services Executive

LEEF - Labour Employer Economic Forum - a forum for high level dialogue between Government, Trade Union and Employer representatives on matters of strategic national importance

NPHE – National Public Health Emergency Response Team

NSAI – National Standards Authority Ireland

Return to Work Safely Protocol, is the result of a collaborative effort by the Health and Safety Authority, the Health Services Executive and the Department of Health, referred to in this document as The Protocol

PPE – Personal Protective Equipment such as gloves, masks, apron/gowns etc

WHO – World Health Organisation

What we know so far about COVID19.

According to the WHO, COVID19 is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus.

Most people infected with the COVID19 virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. Older people, and those with underlying medical problems like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer are more likely to develop serious illness.

The best way to prevent and slow down transmission is be well informed about COVID19, its causes and how it spreads. Protect yourself and others from infection by washing of hands regularly and properly or using an alcohol-based rub frequently and not touching your face.

COVID19 spreads primarily through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets land on objects and surfaces putting others at risk of catching COVID19 by touching these objects or surfaces, then touching their eyes, nose or mouth, so it's important that you also practice respiratory etiquette (for example, by coughing into a flexed elbow) and stay more than 2 meters away from a person who is sick.

At this time, there are no specific vaccines or treatments for COVID19. However, there are many ongoing clinical trials evaluating potential treatments. WHO will continue to provide updated information as soon as clinical findings become available.

Stay informed: What are the most common symptoms of COVID19.

Extract from WHO; Common symptoms are fever, tiredness, and dry cough. Some patients may have aches and pains, nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat or diarrhoea. These symptoms are usually mild and begin gradually.

Some people become infected but do not develop any symptoms and do not feel unwell. Most people (about 80%) recover from the disease without needing special treatment.

Around 1 out of every 6 people who gets COVID19 becomes seriously ill and develops difficulty breathing. Older people, and those with underlying medical problems like high blood pressure, heart problems or diabetes, are more likely to develop serious illness. People with fever, cough and difficulty breathing should seek medical attention.

WHO is assessing ongoing research on the ways COVID19 is spread and will continue to share updated findings, for more information, see the following *Health related* Information and Resources.

Communications

Consistent, regular communication and a collaborative approach between employers, management teams, staff, customers, contractors and visitors is key in the protection of business and people and against the spread of COVID19 in the workplace.

Employers should regularly communicate preventative measures regarding COVID19 in the workplace including the signs and symptoms of COVID-19, how it spreads, cleaning routines and waste disposal as well as advice on hand and respiratory hygiene, physical distancing, use of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) and work equipment where relevant.

The Protocol recently published by Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, Heather Humphreys TD, set out guidelines which must be adhered to.

The HSA will be the lead agency implementing the Protocol and Inspectors will:

- advise and support employers / employees on how they are implementing the COVID19 measures in the workplace,
- visit workplaces and advise on any shortcomings through a Report of Inspection, which is left with the employer at the end of the visit and can include timelines and follow-ups needed.
- have the power to serve an Improvement Notice, a legal directive from an inspector requiring that certain improvements be carried out in a specified time-frame, or a Prohibition Notice, a legal instruction directing that a specified work activity be stopped.
- *if a business does not cooperate and comply with the guidelines after being asked to make improvements, the HSA will be able to order them to shut down the workplace.*

The following main requirements, among others, are included in the Protocol:

- *Each workplace will appoint at least one lead staff representative to ensure that COVID19 measures are strictly adhered to.*
- *Before a workplace reopens, there will be COVID19 induction training for all.*
- *Employers will issue a pre-return to work form for staff to complete at least 3 days in advance of the return to work.*
- *Employers are also required to update their safety plans before reopening, in consultation with, and with the agreement of staff*
- *The plan should include measures relevant to COVID19, for example, social distancing, the provision of hand sanitizers, tissues and clinical waste bags, clear procedures around handwashing and respiratory etiquette, and ensuring proper ventilation on site.*
- *Maintaining a log of any group work in order to facilitate contact tracing*
- *Employers are required to put a response plan in place, outlining details of how they will deal with a suspected case of COVID19 in the workplace.*
- *Breaks and rest periods should be organized to facilitate social distancing*
- *In settings where 2meter separation is not possible, alternative protective measures such as installation of physical barriers/plastic sneeze guards should be put in place*

Review Policies and Guidelines

Communication of changes to workplace Policies and Practices

Sick Leave: review and revise sick leave policies and amend as appropriate in line with normal procedures. In so doing, employers will consult with and communicate to staff, in line with normal procedures, any changes that are introduced to reduce the spread of COVID19.

Occupational health service: If provided on site, ensure it is available to address any worker concerns and communicate the messages about good hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette and physical distancing.

If there is no occupational health service available on site, ensure access is made available to the necessary public health advice from the HSE and other sources as appropriate to staff. The designated staff representative(s) appointed should be involved in communicating the health advice around COVID19 in the workplace.

Changes to work practices or patterns: The Protocol suggests agreeing through negotiation with staff/Trade Unions any temporary restructuring of work patterns that may be required to implement the COVID-19 prevention measures in the workplace. In doing so, any existing sectoral agreements must be taken into account.

Perhaps now is the perfect time to review policies and procedures around other aspects of the business to future proof it and ensure its continuity.

Crisis Management – including Communications during a crisis or closure during a crisis.

If there is already a business continuity planning process, COVID-19 should be included within that process.

For organisations that do not have a continuity planning process in place, the DBEI have produced a checklist in English and Irish, to mitigate disruption to business and plan for continuity during this pandemic, however, please note that these checklists were published prior to the Protocol being released on May 9th.

[Business Continuity Planning Checklist](#)

[Business Continuity Planning Checklist Irish Language](#)

Work practices – are there any others that need to be updated? Are there any practices or operating procedures that could be reviewed in light of COVID19 that could be incorporated as a permanent option for work eg flexible time.

IT Procedures - in particular security measures. There have been many reports in the media over the last number of weeks regarding scams through which business have lost money, ensure all IT security measures are up to date, which should be reviewed regularly as a matter of best practice under normal operations. If in doubt about an email or other communication received, check it first before taking any action with a Manager.

Develop a COVID19 Response Plan

Employers should have regular and meaningful engagement with their staff representative, staff and/or their recognised Trade Union or other representatives (including their Health and Safety Committee where this exists) about the measures being taken in the workplace to

1. address the occupational exposure to COVID19 and
2. ensure that all the actions in the Protocol are fully adhered to in order to suppress COVID19.

Prior to a return to work, employers are **required** to write or update any existing COVID 19 Response Plan. To follow is a checklist of measures listed in the protocol that must be included. Due to the evolving nature of this situation, it is advised that updates from the HSE (and other relevant bodies) be continually monitored and incorporated into a COVID19 Response Plan to ensure it is always up to dates with the most recent guidelines.

Checklist to Develop a COVID19 Response Plan		
Action to be taken	By Whom and When	Complete
Employers will Write/update a workplace COVID19 Policy and will include the following:		
Employers will appoint at least 1 lead Staff member to ensure all COVID19 measures are strictly adhered to in the workplace. This person should be clearly identifiable to all in the workplace *		
Employers will provide COVID-19 induction training for all staff		
Update occupational health and safety risk assessments and safety statement		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure risk assessments have been carried out and updated to reflect COVID19 health and safety measures. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action to be taken in response to a suspected case of COVID-19. Including the controls necessary to address the risks identified 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address the level(s) of risk associated with various workplaces and work activities in the COVID-19 business plans and OSH risk assessments. For example, where, how and to what sources of COVID-19 might workers be exposed, including the general public, customers, co-workers etc. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take into account individual risk factors (e.g. older staff, presence of underlying medical conditions, Pregnant Staff etc.). 		
Contingency measures to address potential absenteeism. Including implementation of the measures necessary to reduce the spread of COVID19, changing work patterns, etc.		

Cleaning Considerations		
First Aid at Work		
Legionella: Control measures to avoid the potential for Legionnaires' disease		
Communications strategy for ongoing updates**		
* The number of staff representatives appointed for COVID19 will, ideally, be proportionate to the number of workers in the workplace.		
** A cross functional team comprising of key personnel may be required depending on the complexity of the organisation to support the COVID19 Designated person.		

In line with the Protocol, plans will be developed in consultation with workers and communicated once finalised

Appoint a Designated person for COVID19 queries

Appoint a designated person for COVID19 queries whose role will include:

(This is not an exhaustive list as requirements are continually being updated by Government)

The person(s) undertaking the role must receive the necessary training and have a structured framework to follow and full support within the organisation to be effective in preventing the spread of the virus.

The designated person will:

Be fully informed and routinely check HSE or other Government Departments web sites for COVID19 updates

Work collaboratively with the employer to assist in the implementation of measures and monitor adherence to the measures to prevent the spread of COVID19

Responsible for the communications strategy of the COVID19 policy, including:

- Clarifying policies and procedures to all staff
- Providing updates as the situation evolves

Act as a central point for employee's COVID19 related queries

Induction Training

Employers must provide the following before a return to work:

<i>Checklist in advance of returning to work for employers</i>		
Action	By Whom and When	Completed
Provide COVID-19 induction training for all staff to make sure that they are up to speed on Public Health Advice and Guidance. At minimum, training should at include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the latest advice and guidance on public health • what to do if staff develop symptoms of COVID19 • details of how the workplace is organised to address the risk from COVID19 • an outline of the COVID19 recovery plan • identification of points of contact from the employer and the workers, and • any other sector specific advice that is relevant. 		
Employers will issue a pre-return to work form for staff to complete at least 3 days in advance of the return to work. See Appendix A: Pre-Return to work questionnaire		
Employers are also required to update their safety plans before reopening, in consultation with, and with the agreement of staff		
Put in place necessary controls identified in the risk assessment to prevent the spread of COVID19 in the workplace and communicate same		
The Protocol also provides that employers should implement temperature testing in line with Public Health advice		

In response to the above, staff are required to:

- complete and return the pre-return to work form before they return to work.
- inform their employer if there are any other circumstances relating to COVID19, not included in the form, which may need to be disclosed to allow their safe return to work.
- self-isolate at home and contact their GP promptly for further advice if they have any COVID19 symptoms.

- stay away from work until all symptoms have cleared following self-isolation.
- participate in any induction training provided on their return to the workplace.
- complete any temperature testing as implemented by the employer and in line with Public Health advice.

In addition to the above requirements, it is advisable to talk to staff on an individual basis to identify any concerns or challenges they may have or anticipate in returning to work.

It is recommended where possible if staff can complete their work whilst remaining at home, to do so.

Are there any core functions or days that they must be in attendance for in work?

Communicate with staff, give them an update as to what has been happening in the business and what steps are being undertaken to return to work.

How do they feel about returning?

Do they have any concerns? What are their fears? Here are some questions I have come across

- I am afraid to go back to work after all this isolation that I might be exposed to COVID19 and bring it home to my family.
- I am afraid of customers or other people coming on site and not respecting our requests for observing social distancing or other measures that might be put in place.
- I do not know how I can go back because I am afraid parts of my job are/might be gone.
- I am afraid for the future of my company – where will I fit in?
- I cannot see how I can go back to work with the current 2 metre restriction in place.
- I cannot bear the idea of going back to work because we have lost a team member during the lockdown – this has also been extended to friends or family, regardless of the cause of death being COVID19 related or not. A hugely traumatic event in a person's life that should be acknowledged and a time for grieving allowed upon return to work.
- I like the idea of flexible work and do not want to go back full time. I would like to explore flexible options such as reduced hours or a portion of time working from home.
- I am so exhausted after all of this – the idea of having to get up for work, get dressed properly and go into work seems like such an ordeal to me.
- I do not know how I will go back as my creche/child minder is not available to me.

Health and Safety Documentation

The measures referred to in this framework are not meant in any way to override health and safety measures that are specific to industry sectors or hazardous environments such as Construction sites, working with hazardous chemicals etc.

Advice from the NPHT will evolve in accordance with the continual phased return to work of the country and guidelines are subject to change. It is therefore advisable that updates are monitored and incorporated into the COVID19 Plan for each workplace accordingly.

Prior to a return to work after the COVID19 lockdown, all businesses should undertake a review of all health and safety documentation, particularly in relation to measure for the ongoing management of COVID19 and communicate to staff. These are listed in the COVID19 Response Plan.

On-going risks associated with COVID19 and Safety measures

All places of work should review work practices or standard operating procedures to address the risk of COVID19 and the associated control measures required.

Introduce daily briefings for the team to communicate any changes to operating procedures, remind members of control measures in place, reporting of suspected or confirmed COVID19 cases.

First Aid

In the event that first aid is required in the workplace it may not be possible to maintain a distance of 2 metres. Workers with a specific role in acting as first responders should be provided with updated training on infection prevention and control principles including performance of hand hygiene and appropriate use of personal protective equipment when delivering first aid.

For eg. In the light of the current pandemic and the possibility that the person who has collapsed may have COVID-19, there is an element of risk associated with CPR.

It is a personal choice to give CPR.

See [COVID-19: HSE advice on performing CPR cardiopulmonary resuscitation](#)

Preventing contamination

Guidelines have been issued by the HSE on effective hand washing, etiquette for coughing or sneezing. For more information see:

[Protect yourself and others from COVID19 - HSE.ie](https://www.hse.ie/eng/health/COVID19/protect_yourself_and_others_from_COVID19.html)

Signage must be displayed in workplaces at various and appropriate locations to communicate the HSE recommendations to prevent infection spread with particular regard to physical distancing and hand washing.

A range of resources and posters are available for printing from the HSE at the link below [here](#).

Masks (Face Coverings)

As of May 15 2020, The Government has issued Guidance on safe use of face coverings.

Wearing a cloth face covering is **recommended** in situations where it is difficult to practice social distancing, for example, in shops or on busy public transport.

Wearing of cloth face coverings may help prevent people who do not know they have the virus from spreading it to others.

If you wear one, you should still do the important things necessary to prevent the spread of the virus. These include:

- washing your hands properly and often
- covering your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve when you cough and sneeze
- not touching your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean
- social distancing (keeping at least 2 metres away from other people)

When to wear one? - You may choose to wear a cloth face covering:

- when staying 2 metres apart from people is difficult - for example, in shops, shopping centres or public transport
- **in an enclosed space with other people**

For more information see: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/aac74c-guidance-on-safe-use-of-face-coverings/>

What to do if there is a suspected or a confirmed case of COVID19 in the Workplace

While staff should not attend work if they are unwell, employers are advised to have a plan in place in the event that a staff member (or other person) becomes unwell and possibly displaying symptoms of COVID19 and who will be responsible for looking after that staff until they leave the workplace.

The prompt identification and isolation of potentially infectious individuals is a crucial step in protecting the staff member involved, their colleagues, customers or others at the workplace.

Employers are required to:

- keep a log of contact/group work to facilitate contact tracing
- inform staff and others of the purpose of the log
- display information on signs and symptoms of COVID19
- provide up to date information on the Public Health advice issued by the HSE and Gov.ie
- provide instruction for staff to follow if they develop signs/symptoms of COVID19 during work

Staff are required to:

- self-isolate at home and contact their GP immediately for further advice if they display any signs or symptoms
- be aware of the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and monitor their own wellbeing
- report to managers immediately if any symptoms develop during the shift

Reporting requirements under Occupational Health and Safety Legislation if a staff member contracts COVID19

There is no requirement for an employer to notify the Health and Safety Authority if a worker contracts COVID-19.

Diseases are not reportable under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Reporting of Accidents and Dangerous Occurrences) Regulations 2016 (S.I. No. 370 of 2016).

COVID-19 is however reportable under the Infectious Diseases (Amendment) Regulations 2020 by a medical practitioner who becomes aware of or suspects an instance of such disease. Such a report should be sent to the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) in the HSE: <https://www.hpsc.ie/notifiablediseases>.

Checklist of steps to follow in the event of somebody becoming unwell in a place of work and suspects they may have COVID19?		
Action	By Whom and When	Completed
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Plan the response to a suspected case 2. Appoint a designated person to deal with any suspect cases 3. Ensure this person is known to all staff 		

Plan the response:

- Appoint an appropriate manager(s) for dealing with suspected cases.
- From the moment a person presents / complains of feeling unwell, they are to be referred to the designated person who will take charge and follow this process
- Identify a designated isolation area in advance. The designated area and the route to the designated area should be easily accessible and as far as is reasonable and practicable should be accessible by people with disabilities.
- Take into account the possibility of one or more persons displaying the signs of COVID19 and have additional isolation areas available or another contingency plan for dealing with same.
- Ensure the designated area has the ability to isolate the person behind a closed door. Where a closed-door area is not possible, the employer must provide for an area away from other workers.
- Provide as is reasonably practicable an open window for ventilation
- Provision of PPE; gloves, masks
- Tissues, hand sanitiser, disinfectant and/or wipes,
- Clinical waste bags if possible, otherwise double bagging used tissues.
- Assess the incident and note actions for follow up/changes for future incidents
- Review contact logs to identify possible contamination risks
- Follow up with close contacts the person and carry out necessary risk assessment for possible contamination

Action to take if a person presents with symptoms of COVID19 at the workplace, the appointed manager must:

- isolate the person and have a procedure in place to accompany them to the designated isolation area via the isolation route, keeping at least 2 metres away from them and also making sure that others maintain a distance of at least 2 metres from them at all times.
- provide a mask for the person presenting with symptoms if one is available. The mask should be worn immediately, in particular if in a common area with other people or while exiting the premises.
- assess whether the person can immediately be directed to go home, Call the person's GP and follow advice regarding self-isolation and other prevention measures e.g. sending to hospital/home
- facilitate the person presenting with symptoms to remain in isolation if they cannot immediately go home until they are able to leave the workplace.
- This person should avoid touching other people, surfaces and objects.
- The person presenting with symptoms should be asked to cover their mouth and nose with a disposable tissue provided when they cough or sneeze and put the tissue in the waste bag provided.
- arrange transport home or to hospital for medical assessment. Public transport of any kind should not be used.
- carry out an assessment of the incident which will form part of determining follow-up actions and recovery.
- Keep a log of direct contact the person had with others whilst in the workplace
- arrange for appropriate cleaning of the isolation area and work areas involved.
- provide advice and assistance if contacted by the HSE.

Contact logging

The NSAI recommendations for contact logging are referred to in the section: *Safety Considerations for Suppliers / Contractors / On-site Visitors*

Cleaning Considerations

Workplaces have potentially been left untouched or had limited people on site for a number of weeks and will therefore need to be cleaned before staff return to work.

What cleaning needs to be undertaken?

Who is going to do this?

When will it be done?

How will it be maintained once staff, customers etc are back on site?

The following are some tips to consider and may be of particular relevance to customer facing businesses or retail outlets.

- A visible cleaning routine can instil staff and visitor confidence.
- Cleaning of all work areas and frequently touched objects and surfaces should be conducted at regular intervals using appropriate disinfectants. Examples include:
 - Trolleys and Baskets
 - Entrance door handles where doors are not automatic
 - Self-service scanner and Card Reader Pin Pads
 - Customer facing counter tops
 - Handles on refrigeration units
 - Weighing Scales
 - Manual Handling Equipment, i.e. forklifts, pallet trucks, etc
 - Communication equipment i.e. headsets, barcode readers, mobile scanners, printers.
 - Waste disposal All wipes used for cleaning should be placed in the bin after meetings. If there is cleaning after a person with a suspected/confirmed case of COVID19, the all waste that has been in contact with the individual, including used tissues, and masks if used, should be put in a normal waste bag. Double bagging should be used. The waste bag should be kept for 72 hours, then thrown into the normal waste.

Legionella

For some places of work such as hotels, leisure facilities, offices, dental clinics and hairdressers, the employer needs to put in place control measures to avoid the potential for Legionnaires' disease before they reopen. Further advice on the prevention of Legionnaires' disease after the COVID-19 Pandemic is available at:

https://www.hsa.ie/eng/topics/biological_agents/specific_biological_agents_infections/legionellosis/co-vid-19_legionella_information_note.pdf and

[The European Society of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases](#)

Physical distancing – is this possible in work?

In planning continuity of work, consider the groups of people expected to come on site and how they need to be managed. Click on the three links below for further information

Safety Considerations for Staff

Safety Considerations for Suppliers / Contractors / On-site Visitors

Safety Considerations for Customers

Managing meetings

Meetings are a necessary part of working life. We now know that there are lots of effective alternative on-line options to hosting meetings. However, if meetings need to be scheduled in person, normal considerations in managing meetings should be regarded such as

- Only invite those that really need to attend.
- Communicate the agenda in advance to ensure participants are prepared (and therefore spend less time in the meeting)
- Start the meeting on time
- Set a time limit and stick to it
- Ensure the room is tidied and cleaned properly after use, surfaces are wiped, door handles cleaned, windows opened if possible and the room is left ready for use by others
- The room is ready when all surfaces that have been cleaned are dry and left with a window open for at least 15minutes.

For any external visitors coming on site for meetings, a communication regarding safety requirements whilst on site should be communicated to them in advance of attending so they are prepared and will be allowed to enter your premises. This may involve contractors, suppliers, delivery people, customers, allied partners etc. Consider people with disabilities. See *Safety Considerations for Suppliers / Contractors / On-site Visitors* for more information.

Safety Considerations for Staff

Management is responsible for the provision of a safe place of work, to manage risks and hazards and for the health and safety of its employees. However, employees also have a role and responsibility to play in their own safety and that of their colleagues.

In line with the Protocol, Employers are required to update their safety plans before reopening, in consultation with, and with the agreement of staff.

Talk to staff in advance of a return to work – how do they feel about it?

What can you or your organisation do to help them transition back safely?

See more about this in the section; ***Error! Reference source not found.***

- Employees themselves have a responsibility to ensure they comply with statutory provisions, cooperate with management, attend training if required, correct use of PPE.
- Employees who are feeling unwell and experiencing any respiratory difficulties are recommended to stay at home, contact the health service and follow the advice given to them and report back to work with an update.
- It is important to follow good practices for hand washing which include using soap and water and washing for over 20 seconds – see HSE recommendations for hand washing: <https://www2.hse.ie/wellbeing/how-to-wash-your-hands.html>
- Touching of the face should be avoided. Regular hand washing with soap and water is effective for the removal of COVID-19. Between washing use of hand sanitisers (70% alcohol base) is recommended.
- Staff are reminded to wear any PPE if it is required to complete their work safely according to the continued health guidelines.
- Avoid getting too close to work colleagues, this means NO shaking hands

Bringing teams back to work all at once may pose difficulties as some workplace environments or layout may require people working closely together ie less than the HSE guideline of 2meters.

Solutions may include;

Review workload and prioritise what needs to be done first and by who?

Bring teams back in waves – what roles are critical to get back to work first?

Can working patterns be rearranged? I.e introduce a shift pattern?

Adjust shifts to allow for flexibility and time between the end of one/start of another shift? This would allow for an air gap and cleaning to be carried out on equipment across shifts.

Split teams - some remain working from home and others come in, could this be rotated?

Can rosters or teams be split to ensure critical personnel do not work in close proximity in order to limit joint exposure and risk to a business function.

Other considerations:

Reduce/minimise movement of staff between certain areas, eg warehouse to shop floor.

If staff are required to clock in/out, could their times be staggered to reduce risk of staff gathering at the one time? Does the location of the clock in/out mechanism facilitate social distancing – can a queuing system be introduced to allow for the 2m distance to be respected?

Certain workplaces split teams by function, some of which remained on site whilst others were moved to work remotely. Merging these teams back into the workplace may not allow for physical distancing restrictions. Can teams stay working remotely? Is this a viable option?

Are staff cross trained in other areas to ensure continuity of service in the event of other team members becoming unwell/absent.

Redeployment – Are there opportunities for staff to move from areas that are not considered work critical to ones that are critical?

On-site facilities

Canteen facilities with staggered break times, tables with reduced seating per table and adequate queuing systems with correct distance markers.

Regular cleaning of communal areas.

The NSAI recommended treatment for waste disposal that has been in contact with an individual suspected of having COVID19, including used tissues, and masks if used, should be put in a normal waste bag. Double bagging should be used. The waste bag should be kept for 72 hours, then thrown into the normal waste

Once back at work, encourage staff to self-assess their work environment, where do they feel they are risk (close working) and what alternatives can they propose to address this.

Mental Health of Staff

It is important to pay attention to the needs and feelings of staff, especially during times of stress. As employers/managers, it is important to be mindful of the impact that these restrictions over the last few weeks have had on everybody (including your own!) from social isolation, financial worries, job security, family worries, bereavement, mental health etc.

Employee Wellbeing

In order to promote employee safety and wellbeing throughout the remainder of the lockdown and a planned return to work, special attention should be paid to individuals with physical and learning disabilities or other specific needs (e.g. pregnancy, temporary disability due to injury). Consultation and planning in advance to meet these requirements can reduce risk and reassure staff. Consideration to the cultural diversity of staff should be acknowledged and the fear for distant family members.

There is much public discussion around mental health during this time and encouragement to live healthier and more meaningful lives.

Until such time as a full return to work is possible, encourage staff to take care of themselves. During team meetings, talk about maintaining healthy routines and structure throughout the day. For example, topics for discussion may include:

- exercise regularly, especially walking but keep within 5 kilometres of the home
- keep regular sleep routines
- maintain a healthy, balanced diet
- avoid excess alcohol
- practice relaxation techniques such as breathing exercises
- read a book
- search for online exercise or yoga classes, concerts, religious services or guided tours
- do something creative to keep spirits up

See *Other resources and Mental Health Services*

Upon the return to work, mental health should not be forgotten about.

Take this as an opportunity to engage more with staff on mental health issues.

Review policies regarding mental health in the workplace and update where necessary.

Talk to staff – talk about the difficulties of the lockdown, talk about what would help them return to work – and stay at work.

Travelling for work

Do you have employees who need to travel for work?

How will they continue to do their work – via telephone and on-line platforms?

When travel restrictions are eased, ensure staff know of any protocols for other work environments they may be attending or visiting. In particular if staff are working across multiple sites in the organisation.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade advises against all non-essential travel overseas until further notice. This includes Great Britain but does not apply to Northern Ireland. It also includes all travel by cruise ship. Avoid non-essential travel until further notice, for further information click on the link below:

[Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade](#)

Safety Considerations for Suppliers / Contractors / On-site Visitors

Management is responsible for any person who comes into the workplace as a Supplier, Contractor or On-site Visitor and for ensuring their safety whilst there.

Communicating with Suppliers, Contractor or Visitors

- Identify essential suppliers / service providers and discuss any anticipated issues around business continuity
- Develop a plan on how and when to activate alternative suppliers should there be any disruption to the supply chain.
- Before coming on site, do any specific safety measures that are in place need to be communicated that they will have to adhere to?
- Does this pose any difficulties for people with disabilities eg reading posters, signing declarations etc

The National Standards Authority of Ireland offer advice in relation to visitors on site. To follow is an extract from their publication “**COVID-19** Workplace Protection and Improvement Guide”.

A restriction on visitors to the site should be put in place. However, where business critical visitors are required to attend the site, a controlled access process should be in place including adherence to sanitisation processes and full personal contact details (e.g. telephone number, last place visited should be collected to assist with contact tracing).

See template to record this information as [Appendix B – Visitor Access Process](#).

Solutions may include:

Specific health measures that visitors need to be aware of should be communicated in advance of their entering the workplace. This can be done by way of

- email – this can be information can be shared as a leaflet or poster
- updates on company web sites or social media – may include video
- poster/info graphics on the front door or other points of entry
- reminding staff who are expecting visitors to bring to their attention the safety measures in place immediately upon arrival their arrival to your place of work.

In all cases – ask the question – Do they really need to be on site?

Stagger delivery times to ensure not too many deliveries are being accepted at the one time – this will reduce the number of people on site at any one time and the amount of time spent there.

Safety Considerations for Customers

Management are responsible for visitors to their premises, but visitors are also responsible for their own safety.

Communicate in advance with customers

- Identify essential clients and discuss any continuity issues you anticipate ensuring that plans are in place to meet their needs.
- Develop a plan on how and when to activate alternative delivery means if the regular route to customers changes for any reason.
- Before coming on site, do customers need to be informed of any specific safety measures in place that they will have to adhere to, does this pose any difficulties for people with disabilities eg reading posters, signing declarations, floor markings etc
- Are safety posters required at points of entry to the workplace.
- Particular consideration should be given to customer facing staff, including duration of contact during customer transactions and appropriate measures such as perspex screens to protect staff.
- Introduction of floor markers to monitor and remind customers to maintain physical distancing and directing flow through the shop or queuing system.
- Contactless transactions should be encouraged as the preferred method of payment.
- Regular cleaning of facilities should be undertaken, in some cases areas may need to be cordoned for cleaning prior to new clients entering the premises.

Linens, clothing and laundry items.

Extract from NSAI - COVID19 Retail Protection and Improvement Guide

- Do not shake dirty laundry to minimize the possibility of dispersing virus through the air.
- Set up systems to ensure safe segregation of clean and dirty laundry items and to prevent mix ups.
- Wash items as appropriate in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. If possible, launder items using the warmest appropriate water setting for the items and dry items completely.
- Dirty laundry that has been in contact with an ill person can be washed with other people's items.
- Clean and disinfect hampers or other carts for transporting laundry according to guidance above for hard or soft surfaces.
- If laundry is sent to a contract laundry cleaner, ensure physical distancing measures are set up for the drop off and collection of laundry.

Resources and Further Reading

Health related Information and Resources

[WHO - Q&A on coronaviruses \(COVID-19\)](#) – World Health Organisation works worldwide to promote health, keep the world safe, and serve the vulnerable.

[HSE - Coronavirus](#) – An overview of what COVID19 is from the HSE

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) posters and resources](#) – The HSE has produced posters, booklets and videos for use in workplaces and communities to raise awareness about preventing the spread of coronavirus. These are available for download and printing.

[Department of Health, Ireland](#) - The Department of Health's mission is to improve the health and wellbeing of people in Ireland by delivering high quality health services and getting best value from health system resources.

[Health and Safety Authority - COVID19](#) – For more general matters related to occupational health and safety (OSH) requirements, please refer to the relevant legislation, guidance and advice available on the Health and Safety Authority.

Occupational Health and Safety Helpline

For information on workplace health and safety contact the Occupational Health and Safety Helpline on Tel: 1890 289 389 or (01) 614 7000

Email: wcu@hsa.ie (Workplace Contact Unit)

Information on continuity of business

[Return to Work Safely Protocol - DBEI](#) - designed to support employers and workers to put measures in place that will prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace when the economy begins to slowly open up.

[Government supports for COVID-19 impacted businesses - DBEI](#) - The DBEI has issued a series of links and details of key supports and resources available to help businesses.

[NSAI Retail Guide COVID19](#) – Retail Improvement and protection guide as published by National Safety Authority Ireland (NSAI). For support in relation to improving your COVID-19 related prevention and recovery measures in the workplace, contact the NSAI COVID-19 helpline.

Tel: 01 807 3800

Email: COVID-19-support@nsai.ie

[Bord Bia](#) - A link to the Bord Bia COVID19 Hub of information and resources

Other resources and Mental Health Services

[In This Together](#) – Campaign launched by the Irish Government with tips on how you can look after your **mental wellbeing, stay active** and **stay connected**

[Healthy Ireland](#) - Healthy Ireland is a government-led initiative aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of everyone living in Ireland.

[Mental Health Ireland](#) - At Mental Health Ireland, our aim is to promote positive mental health and wellbeing for all individuals and communities and to support people with lived experience of mental health challenges in their recovery, bringing practical expression to national policy objectives.

[Samaritans](#) - Round the clock support for people in need; whether your situation is urgent or you just need someone to talk to. You can also contact them if you are worried about a friend and you don't have to be over 18. Calls are confidential and you don't have to give personal details if you don't want to. Call 116 123.

[Aware](#) - A nationwide organization that provides education, information and support for people dealing with depression or bipolar disorder in Ireland. They provide emotional and practical support through their helpline, which is open Monday to Sunday from 10am to 10pm.

[Grow](#) is a mental health organization in Ireland. It helps people who have suffered or are suffering from mental health problems.

[Shine](#) aims to empower people with mental health issues and their families by offering support, information and education.

[Pieta House](#) is a non-profit organization providing treatment for those experiencing suicidal thoughts or self-harm. They also operate the Suicide Bereavement Counselling centers to provide free counselling, therapy and support to those who have been affected by suicide.

Appendices

Appendix A: Pre-Return to work questionnaire

Before returning to work, the following pre-return to work steps should be put in place and completed by both employers and workers.

<p>In order to implement COVID-19 Prevention and Control Measures to Minimise risk to Staff and in accordance with the Return to Work Safely Protocol issued on May 9 2020, All staff are being asked to complete the following questionnaire and return it to work.</p>	
Do you have symptoms of cough, fever, high temperature, sore throat, runny nose, breathlessness or flu like symptoms now or in the past 14 days?	Yes or No*
Have you been diagnosed with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 infection in the last 14 days?	Yes or No*
Are you a close contact of a person who is a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19 in the past 14 days (i.e. less than 2m for more than 15 minutes accumulative in 1 day)?	Yes or No*
Have you been advised by a doctor to self-isolate at this time?	Yes or No*
Have you been advised by a doctor to cocoon at this time?	Yes or No*
<p>I confirm to the best of my knowledge that I have no symptoms of COVID19</p> <p>Signed:</p> <p>Date:</p>	
<p>I confirm that I am not self-isolating or awaiting the results of a COVID19 test</p> <p>Signed:</p> <p>Date:</p>	
<p><i>*If any staff answer Yes to any of the questions, they are strongly advised to follow the medical advice they receive or seek medical advice before returning to work.</i></p>	

Appendix B – Visitor Access Process

Visitor/Contractor Covid-19 Questionnaire
Name:
Company:
Mobile No.:
Visiting:
Date:

To ensure the Safety & Health of all people interacting with XXX Ireland locations, visitors and contractors must complete this declaration form prior to entering our sites. If you indicate to us you have symptoms of COVID-19 OR you have been abroad in the last 14 days with exception to Northern Ireland you should not be at work. Where this is the case, you are prohibited from entering the site and advised to seek professional medical help/assistance.

1.	Have you visited any of the countries outside Ireland excluding Northern Ireland?	Yes / No
2.	Are you suffering any flu like symptoms/symptoms of coronavirus covid-19?	Yes / No
3.	Are you experiencing any difficulty in breathing, shortness of breath?	Yes / No
4.	Are you experiencing any fever like/Temperature symptoms?	Yes / No
5.	Did you consult a Doctor or other medical practitioner?	Yes / No
6.	How are you feeling Healthwise?	Well / Unwell
7.	Have you been in contact with someone who has visited an affected region in the past 14 days?	Yes / No
NOTE: When on site, please adhere to our on-site standard processes/procedures regarding infection control, i.e. hand washing/hand sanitising and general coughing/sneezing etiquette?		
Signature Visitor:		Date:
(Please circle your answers above)		

Mary Finn established Connect4Work in 2018 offering a range of services with two main areas of focus.

Firstly; early interventions aimed at supporting a person remain in work prior to the degradation of their health or other concern putting them at risk of an absence from work.

Secondly; case management to facilitate the workplace prepare for the return of an absent employee by exploring reasonable accommodations and reducing the risk and duration of absence. Employees are assisted to identify barriers to return, solutions to reduce/remove these and include them in their return to work plan.

Both elements of the service are collaborative in nature and require inputs from both employer and employee. Supports continue post return to ensure the return to work plan is progressing accordingly.

Mary also delivers Training modules on returning to work after Maternity/Adoptive Leave.

People ask me, why do I work at this?

My answer is simply because I believe that everybody has a pathway back to work, they just need to find it – and I do not like the idea of anybody being lost.

I trust that the information contained in this framework will be of use to you and your organisation as you plan your return to work post COVID19 lockdown.

If you have any further queries in relation to the information contained in this framework – please do contact me via email at mary@connect4work.ie.

Mary Finn
Connect4Work
www.connect4work.ie