

FAQs on Risk assessments and Responsibility

Who is responsible for businesses carrying out a Covid19 risk assessment and re-opening safely to be 'Covid secure'?

It is a business's sole responsibility to complete a Covid19 risk assessment to ensure they are safe to re-open and trade – in line with national government guidance. Environmental Health teams at local councils are proactively assisting businesses with advice and by producing guidance and tools to help. They cannot however approve or create your risk assessment for you and you do not need to wait for their approval to reopen. As a business your duty is to carry out that risk assessment in relation to Covid-19 and to implement controls prior to opening in the same way as for any other risks in your business. Once open environmental health teams will continue to provide advice where possible, will respond to complaints, will be monitoring compliance and will continue to work within their communities to increase awareness and share best practice. Note that businesses regulated by the HSE should seek advice from HSE and not the local council and any enforcement will be undertaken by HSE in the normal way.

Do I need to display any signage/posters and seek approval or certification before re-opening?

The guidance for businesses from the government does encourage you to display information to reassure and inform staff and customers of the measures taken to be Covid-secure. See the 'Five steps to safer working' poster here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/951736/staying-covid-19-secure-notice.pdf and we also have included a copy within our toolkit of resources.

The Council would advise you to conduct your own risk assessment as you know your business better than anyone else does. Criminals are often trying to take advantage of people at a time like this, so please ensure that you always check the credentials of people or companies that contact you. You can protect yourself by being aware of common scams.

How should I go about starting my risk assessment?

We have provided checklists in relation to Covid-19 to help you complete the necessary risk assessments. If you work your way through these, they will allow you to start to identify key hazards in your business. Once you have identified the significant hazards, you will be able to identify the necessary control; those which are already in place, if effective should be listed, but if you need to put additional controls in place these can also be listed in your 'additional controls required' section. If you are already running a business, the concept of risk assessment should not be new as you will have been assessing risks from various health and safety aspects anyway; Covid is a significant risk, albeit a new one, but you should therefore address this in a similar way. You can also check your local council's website to see if they offer any additional assistance.

When might I use a Health & Safety Consultant?

You do not have to use a consultant to meet your health and safety obligations. You are the expert for your business, and so should be able to identify the risks and necessary safety measures associated to it.

If you are overwhelmed with the amount of guidance that exists in relation to health and safety, and Covid-19 in particular, then you may wish to use a consultant. However, please remember that although your local environmental health service cannot write your risk assessment for you, they may be able to provide further guidance (along with our toolkit of resources) to be able to write your own.

Once I have produced my risk assessment, is that it?

Where your risk assessment identifies the need for control measures, you will need to plan for these measures to be put in place; you may wish to use our action plan template within our toolkit to help you do this. If the risks identified affect your staff, customers, or anyone else, they may need to be advised, or at least informed whenever they are on your site, i.e. signage.

In addition, risk assessments are not passive documents, as in once written, never to be seen again. You will need to review your risk assessments either whenever a situation changes, or periodically so as to make sure it, and the safety measures it identifies are still relevant. If there are no changes, then you need do no additional work until the next review, but if there are changes necessary, then these new measures will again need to be implemented and your staff advised again of any changes.

Unless a situation changes, risk assessments should be fully reviewed ideally annually just so that it can be made sure they remain accurate and relevant.

What should I do in terms of communication with staff on measures I've put in place to keep them safe?

It is important that you use all of your existing measures to communicate with your staff – that might be through regular meetings, newsletters and noticeboards. It is particularly important that you also consider any staff that have changed their work base e.g. working from home/remotely and how this needs to be considered with the review of your risk assessments.

If your risk assessment highlights that key changes are required, or that a particular activity needs to be carried out in a different way, then this must be advised to your staff as a matter of urgency.

There is a wide range of information available on how to communicate with your staff effectively, along with posters and signage you can display at your premises provided by Hertfordshire county council:

www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/staysafetoolkit It is really important that your staff are engaged with this process and clearly understand what is expected of them.

Where else can I access support with this?

If you need further guidance you can contact your local environmental team who will support where they can, along with directing you to our recently produced county Covid toolkit of re-opening and trading safely guides, checklists and templates: [Explore the online guidance](#) which is intended to support businesses to complete their Covid19 risk assessment and put new processes and procedures in place to re-open and trade safely.