

Risk assessment checklist for safety reps

All employers are legally required to conduct risk assessments of the dangers faced by their workers, and any other interested parties who use their workplaces. This is particularly relevant to workplaces that are opening up, or have workers returning to work, following the COVID-19 lockdown. However, all employers are required to conduct COVID risk assessments in line with Government and Health and Safety Executive guidance.

The precise steps taken may vary from one employer to another but they all will involve:

- identifying the hazard
- deciding who may be harmed and how
- assessing the risks and preventive measures required
- reviewing the findings.

As well as the physical environment, the COVID Secure risk assessment should include anyone employees are working with and providing services for.

Below is a simple checklist of what these measures involve. More details on the preventive measures required, such as working from home, social distancing, personal hygiene, shielding of the most vulnerable workers and PPE is available on the UNISON COVID-19 advice pages

<https://www.unison.org.uk/coronavirus-rights-work/>

The hazards

Has the employer considered all the potential hazards for the way the work is actually done?

Have they identified all the possible way COVID-19 could be spread where you are working?

These include

- entrance areas
- poorly ventilated areas
- doors (and how they open/close)
- toilets and (hand) washing facilities
- lifts and stairs
- bedrooms/personal living spaces,
- wards, classrooms, office space
- kitchens and other food preparations areas
- meeting rooms, restaurants/eating/drinking areas and other communal areas
- halls/passageways
- driving cabs (transport workers)
- crowded outdoor areas such as parks, gardens, play areas and courtyards
- incoming post and other goods
- all situations that involve close/face to face contact with service users.

Has the risk assessment included the risks of infection through contact with service users?

This would include all those:

- that involve close and face-to-face contact
- who may have COVID-19
- where social distancing is difficult to maintain.

Have they considered other hazards that have resulted from the current pandemic?

These include:

- anxiety, stress and other mental-health issues
- isolation (both physical and mental)
- assaults from service users
- legionella, water, gas and electricity checks when re-opening buildings/restarting work.

Who may be harmed and how?

Has the employer considered all those who might be harmed?

These could include:

- their own employees
- those working for other employers working on their site
- contractors/self-employed
- service users, patients, students and pupils
- visitors and other members of the public.

Has the employer considered all the ways in which their staff or others may be harmed/infected?

Have they identified all those to who they owe a duty of care, whether they be staff or service-users, who are classed as being either at most or moderate risk from COVID-19 due to an underlying health condition?

Guidance on protecting disabled people and those with health conditions is available from the UNISON COVID-19 advice pages

<https://www.unison.org.uk/coronavirus-rights-work/>

Has the employer identified all other groups at increased risk through COVID-19?

These could include:

- Black workers. Research has shown these groups to be at increased risk of infection, disease and death through COVID-19. UNISON has produced sector advice and guidance for branches in supporting Black members to get risk assessed.
<https://www.unison.org.uk/coronavirus-rights-work/>
- Pregnant workers: employees must carry out a risk assessment for new and expectant mothers and take measures to reduce any risks to them and the unborn child.

- Older workers: even if they are below 70 (the age over which any worker is considered to be at “moderate” increased risk), research has shown the older a worker is, the more at risk they are of infection from COVID-19
- Regional variations: there is increased evidence of regional variations in the infection rate and outcomes of COVID-19. Where employers have staff employed in various regional centres across the country, they are required to take these differences into account when conducting their risk assessments.
- Poor and deprived backgrounds (research has shown the poorer you are, the more at risk you are).

Have they considered the risk of infection in workers travelling to work and between work places? (although employers only have a legal duty of care to employees while they are at work, it is accepted good practice in the current pandemic for employers to take account of the risks for workers getting to and from work).

Assessing the risks, and prevention and control

Has the employer made a suitable and sufficient assessment of the risks?

Have the principles of prevention been applied?

In order of priority employers are legally required to consider how hazards could be:

- eliminated (in the case of COVID-19 this could mean working from home)
- substituting a more hazardous way of working for a less hazardous one (for example, conducting meetings by video-conference rather than face to face)
- engineering controls (e.g. improved ventilation, perspex screens) and admin controls (social distancing, segregation of those suspected of having COVID-19)
- Personal protective equipment (PPE).

Please note it is not either/or, all measures **must** be considered, and all required measures applied. Advice and guidance on all the measures to control COVID-19 is available from the UNISON COVID-19 advice page.

Are there any other measures that you or the other employees can think of that could further reduce the risks faced?

Is health surveillance being provided (through testing and contact tracing), if so is it adequate? Recording and applying the findings. The latest advice on testing is available from UNISON COVID-19 advice page.

Has the employer recorded the key findings of the risk assessment?

Does the risk assessment record who will ensure that it is implemented or at least followed up?

Have you been consulted on the risk assessment?

Have the employees been informed of what they need to know to remain safe?

Has the employer implemented the measures of prevention and control?

Is there a date given for when the risk assessment should be reviewed?

Reviewing the assessment

Have there been any changes which indicate that the risk assessments should be reviewed?

In the case of COVID 19 this could include:

- use of new equipment (such as PPE)
- new technology (such as testing and contact tracing)
- latest government guidance.
- following workplace outbreaks

Is it time for the periodic review of risk assessments?

Competency and consultation

Are safety reps consulted on the appointment of competent persons?

Are risk assessments carried out by competent persons?

This means someone who:

- preferably already works for the employer
- has a knowledge and understanding of the work, the applicable hazards, the principles of risk assessment and prevention, and of up-to-date health and safety measures
- is able to identify health and safety issues, assess the need for action, design, develop, and implement strategies and plans, promote health, safety and welfare advances and good practices and identify their own limitations and know when to call in specialist expertise.

Are safety reps and workers meaningfully consulted on the risk assessments?

Have any specific regulations been considered and complied with, for example those covering hazardous substances, asbestos, or fire?

Has how the work is actually done been assessed rather than how the work is “supposed” to be done?

What if I don't feel my workplace is safe?

UNISON believes that members should never be in a situation where they might endanger themselves and others in the course of doing jobs.

Putting you in that situation is potentially a breach of health and safety law and may spread coronavirus to people in high-risk groups.

As a last resort, when faced with a dangerous working environment which cannot reasonably be averted, every employee has the right not to suffer detriment if they leave, or refuse to attend their place of work (or take other appropriate steps) in circumstances where they reasonably believe there is a risk of being exposed to serious and imminent danger (section 44 of the Employment Rights Act 1996).

Although this is very much a right of last resort, the context of a situation will be the key to whether refusing to return to work, or any other steps are appropriate. This means that an employee cannot automatically refuse a reasonable instruction to return to work without a good reason.

- If you feel you are being put at risk it is crucial to get advice and discuss the situation with your UNISON representative. The first step is to [contact your branch](#) and then, if needed, you can seek advice from our regional office or [legal team](#).