

Safety Note 76

3rd Edition, January 2021

COVID-19 RISK-REDUCTION MEASURES

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Introduction

During the Covid-19 pandemic the University will continue to manage its work activities in accordance with UK Government regulations and advice. The Major Recovery Team reviews and updates the Corporate-Level Covid-19 Risk Assessment as necessary. When University restrictions and rules change they are being communicated to staff and students. For the latest instructions see [these webpages](#).

Corporately the University has already established many Covid-19 risk controls. A Corporate-Level Covid-19 Risk Assessment (available [here](#)) designates where responsibility lies for significant aspects of risk control. For larger buildings Common Areas Plans (CAPs) detail control measures for commonly accessible lobbies, corridors, kitchens, toilets, etc. General Covid-19 instructions have been issued to all staff by email. All staff have access to the [extensive FAQs on the Staff Portal](#) and are expected to complete the Covid-19 re-induction modules on [UoRLearn](#). Staff involved in delivering or supporting teaching are expected to also complete the Covid-19 teaching module on UoRLearn.

This 3rd Edition of SN 76 provides updated guidance to managers and staff on how they should tailor local health & safety arrangements to reduce the risk of transmission of the virus which causes Covid-19.

This Safety Note should be considered alongside guidance in Safety Notes 75, 77 and 78 (all reviewed in January 2021). Consult your local Health & Safety Co-ordinator (HSC) for advice on interpreting and applying University guidance in specific circumstances.

Fundamentals

- Generally, work which can be undertaken effectively at home should **be done from home**. Work should only be undertaken on campus **where that is necessary, and this has been approved**.
- Eligibility Criteria indicating **which work activities are currently allowed on campus** are being published within the FAQs on the Staff portal [here](#).
- Colleagues who need access to work on campus or the wider University Estate **must have the agreement of their Head of School or Function** before coming on site. The process for approval is described [here](#).
- Work which must be done on site should be arranged, where possible, so that different people or teams **use premises at different times or on different days** to avoid interaction.
- Staff and students should make efforts to remain familiar with current UK government advice on typical Covid-19 symptoms and ensure that if they develop these symptoms they **do not come on to campus**, even if the symptoms are mild.
- Interactions can be made lower risk by **increasing the distance** between people (preferably over 2 metres) and **reducing the time** people are close (preferably less than 15 minutes) - brief passing interactions are lower risk.
- The requirements and expectations around **use of face coverings** have changed and may change again – find the latest [here](#).
- **Frequently wash hands** with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and **avoid touching the face**.
- **Use a clean tissue** when coughing or sneezing and dispose of it promptly.

Public Health Advice

There are no reasonably practical measures which can reduce the risk of transmission to zero. Where staff have been advised by UK public health bodies to undertake a PCR test and self-isolate at home, or shield at home because they are clinically extremely vulnerable, then the University expects staff to follow those instructions and inform their line managers. Self-isolation and shielding cannot be achieved on University property (other than in residential spaces).

Risk Assessment and Induction

Assessment of risk in local workspaces, and the establishment of local control measures, must be done within Schools and Functions by those in control of the work activities, and be tailored to local circumstances. There is no general requirement to replace existing risk assessment documents before resuming work on campus or to write a new “Covid-19 risk assessment” document for every task, team or workspace. However, those in control of work activities should **review the existing risk assessment(s)** considering the additional hazard of Covid-19.

Confirm the current risk assessment is suitable and sufficient. If it is not, replace it with a new risk assessment, or make a note of additional control measures required locally during the pandemic. These may need to be task- or area-specific, but in some cases one note would suffice for a larger set of tasks or spaces.

Consider the guidance in this Safety Note during the risk assessment review and before seeking approval to resume work activities on campus. Consult the local HSC if you need advice on how to interpret and apply this guidance in specific circumstances. HSCs can also help co-ordinate Covid19 control measures across a building. HSCs may in turn seek professional H&S advice from their Liaison Advisor within H&S Services.

Useful UK Government guidance, including practical examples for different environments such as laboratories, vehicles, offices and workshops, is available at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

Managers, supervisors and those in control of labs, etc, should make use of the corporate instructions and their own task- or area-specific risk assessments when they deliver local induction of staff and students, to ensure local controls are understood and implemented.

After resuming work, monitor the implementation of corporate and local arrangements in your local workplace to identify if they are not working as intended - see below.

CAPs have been developed by local HSCs and they will be periodically reviewed and amended if necessary.

Research

Eligibility Criteria indicating which research activities are currently allowed on campus are being published within the FAQs on the Staff portal [here](#).

Research activities should not resume on campus unless those in control of the activity have confirmed that necessary support services are also available. For laboratory research the Principal Investigator should ensure with Technical Services that appropriate staff are available to autoclave waste, receive and dispatch items within Stores, etc, where these functions are necessary for compliance with health and safety procedures.

Consider whether emergency procedures can be adequately actioned in the event of unplanned occurrences, such as a chemical spill. Work with radioactive open sources is currently not allowed without permission from the Scientific Safety Advisor. Separate advice has been provided to School Radiation Protection Supervisors on radiation monitoring and source location checks, and to Schools which undertake research with genetically modified organisms. If in doubt, contact your local HSC.

Teaching

See Safety Note 78 accessible [here](#).

Avoiding Interaction

Consider if it is reasonably practicable to avoid human interaction. For example, consider if services previously delivered in person can be modified to allow completion online or through the post. Aim to move meetings and training sessions online where possible. Explore designating lab, meeting, office and storage spaces for use by specified teams only, to prevent unnecessary mixing (consultation with Strategy & Space Management may be required). Consider adjustments to working times (eg bringing in different teams on different days or at different times of day) to avoid concurrent occupation of workspaces. Consider segmenting larger teams into smaller ones (or “bubbles”) which do not mix in person with other teams. Consider introducing access controls, signage and telephone helplines to prevent casual visitors walking into workplaces where their presence is not essential.

Only those approved to work on campus should visit inside buildings. Other colleagues should not be encouraged or assisted to access workspaces - even on a temporary or occasional basis. Casual visitors should not be admitted.

Encourage even those approved to be on campus to dial-in to meetings from their desks where this will be effective in reducing in-person interaction.

Lifts should be reserved for those with a genuine need arising from disability (including invisible disabilities), injury, illness or a manual handling task. Other staff should use stairs. Only one person at a time should ride within the lift car and all staff should show courtesy allowing others ample space to exit before entering themselves. For lift buttons see below.

While brief passing encounters are already lower risk, consider if one-way systems are practicable. (CAPs already introduce one-way systems in some common areas in some buildings). In the event of activation of a fire alarm all areas should be used as required by the fire escape strategy for that building, regardless of any one-way restrictions brought in for Covid19. No changes may be made which would impact on emergency escape routes without explicit approval from the Fire Safety Advisor on safety@reading.ac.uk, telephone 0118 378 8888 .

Fire drills have been temporarily halted. Alternative means, including UoRLearn, will be used to remind staff and students of fire escape procedures and the location of fire alarm activation points, extinguishers, escape routes and emergency exits.

Reducing the Density or Duration of Interactions

Where sharing of workspaces is necessary consider if larger meeting spaces or offices are available and can be used to reduce density. Keep gatherings, especially larger gatherings, as short as possible. Corridors should not be used for casual gatherings or conversations. Consider re-spacing workstations, or re-locating people among existing workstations. Consider removing chairs from unused workstations to discourage casual use. Where appropriate, tape off alternate rows of fixed seating or other areas to encourage people to stay at a distance from each other.

Where teams provide direct services to visitors explore options to alter services to minimise in-person visitors. If some in-person service remains necessary it should be by prior appointment if possible, to minimise congestion, density and loitering. Where the potential for other measures has been exhausted, employ signage and floor markings to maintain social distancing between drop-in visitors. For screens see below.

Where not already covered by a CAP, consider toilets and devise local arrangements which reduce interactions. Depending on physical layout this may include knock-before-entry, taping off cubicles or designating different toilets to different teams (consultation with Strategy & Space Management is required).

Signs & Physical Control Measures

Install signage to communicate workspace-specific arrangements. Consider if the installation of clear or opaque screens or panels will provide effective isolation or protection from inadvertent sneezes, coughs, etc. However, this should only be considered after other options for avoiding and reducing interaction have been exhausted and where residual risk is assessed to be significant.

Estates are already managing ventilation systems in accordance with current UK Covid-19 guidance. Try to optimise ventilation by using windows and doors (on keeping fire doors open see below). Stickers on windows indicate where they can and should be opened. Investigate concerns about poor ventilation. Estates can assist with air quality testing and can be contacted on ext 7000.

Control of Risk from Surfaces

Current official advice emphasises that symptomatic people remain the highest source of virus. However, transmission from virus on surfaces (fomites) is possible if people touch them and subsequently transfer virus from their hands to their own mouth, nose or eyes. Remind every worker that handwashing is a demonstrably effective control measure against transmission of Covid-19. Ensure access to suitable handwashing facilities as part of preparing for resumption of work activities - do not resume without them. To encourage handwashing encourage the use of pre-task barrier cream and post-wash moisturiser cream where appropriate. To replenish soap and other washroom supplies contact the Estates Helpdesk on ext 7000.

Explore options for resetting printers and similar equipment to allow online control, avoiding the need for multiple people to use shared touchscreens. Review the need for use of number pads, keys, whiteboard markers, calculators, hole-punches, tool sets or other shared physical objects. Consider labelling items and putting them on personal issue. Where light switches are identified as a significant problem explore with Estates if options such as motions sensors may be practicable. Consider fixing doors open to minimise contact with door handles. Some technical solutions exist to hold doors open which release on alarm. Further advice is available from the Fire Safety Advisor. No fire doors should be wedged, tied or propped open without explicit approval from the Fire Safety Advisor.

Concerns arising from contact with lift buttons can be managed through handwashing. Where local circumstances mean this does not provide adequate risk control line managers should ensure lift-users have access to additional controls such as disposable gloves, anti-viral wipes or hand sanitiser, on personal issue. It is recommended line managers seek advice from HSCs before responding to such requests.

Kitchens can remain open for those who need them. However, staff should be encouraged to minimise use of them and bring in drinks and food. Staff should be encouraged to picnic on their own blankets in outdoor spaces for their meal breaks, while still paying attention to hand hygiene and social distancing.

Eating or drinking can create aerosols and these activities should be discouraged in shared spaces (including lifts), where practically possible, and should not occur during business meetings. Where appropriate, establish a clear-desk policy to reduce potential contamination by food or drinks, to reduce risks to cleaning colleagues, and to help them implement cleaning regimes effectively.

Ensure waste bins already provided are readily available for disposal of tissues. Monitor them and contact the appropriate services in good time to avoid overspill.

Post

Postal Services will store incoming items at Whiteknights House and deliver by arrangement, seeking to deliver during least busy times. Items for despatch can be taken to Postal Services by appointment only. No casual drop-in is currently permitted.

University Drivers

Where possible swapping and sharing of vehicles should be minimised. Where it cannot be avoided line managers should ensure drivers have access to additional controls such as disposable gloves, anti-viral wipes or hand sanitiser, on personal or per vehicle issue. It is expected that all staff wear face coverings while in University vehicles, even when alone in the vehicle, to minimise viral load on surfaces.

Enhanced Cleaning

Changes have already been made to cleaning regimes and protocols to target potential fomites. This enhanced cleaning may not be visible as cleaners will mostly work out of office hours to minimise non-

essential contact with other staff. Protocols have been devised for additional cleaning in the event of positive Covid-19 test results for workers known to have come on site.

Where a manager becomes aware of a positive test result for a person who has been working on campus that manager should immediately ensure the sick person's office or workstation is locked or taped off (if this is possible) to protect cleaners who may visit on the following morning. The line manager should also contact Cleaning Services to discuss further cleaning options. Cleaning Services will apply agreed protocols, which in some cases may involve maintaining the restriction on the area and a deliberate delay of 72 hours before cleaning. (Where managers become aware of a positive test result they should also inform the University using the online form – see below under Outbreaks.)

Where indoor areas have very low pedestrian traffic cleaning may actually be reduced to minimise risk to cleaning staff.

Other Behavioural Controls

All staff are expected to minimise the concern they cause among colleagues by maintaining high levels of courtesy. Refrain from gathering for casual conversations in common areas, especially where this would require others to pass close to speakers. Generally try to refrain from talking (including into mobile phones) while moving through corridors and restricted common areas, other than brief social greetings.

Monitoring, Review and Reporting Concerns

Staff should report social distancing issues or concerns with their line managers. As always, anyone may also use the incident notification online form [here](#) to report a health or safety concern, near miss or dangerous occurrence. This can be done anonymously. Typically incidents notified through this process are dealt with by the local HSC in the first instance, supported where necessary by Health & Safety Services.

Managers should respond appropriately to concerns, seeking advice from the local HSC if needed. They should also proactively monitor the implementation of social distancing arrangements.

Local Health & Safety Committees should review the effectiveness of social distancing and other Covid-19 risk control measures within their routine committee meetings.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Hand Sanitiser

The University will continue to supply PPE to protect against exposure to hazardous substances, as identified in existing risk assessments. However, it currently has no plans to supply PPE (including masks) solely for protection against the Covid19 virus, unless a risk assessment has specifically identified that staff are at particular risk of infection arising directly from work activities.

Similarly, the University typically will not supply hand sanitiser as a required risk control measure, except where risk assessment has identified this as an appropriate control measure. Generally, where handwashing facilities are available hand sanitiser will not be provided as a formally required risk control. However, hand sanitiser will be supplied in many locations across campus as a reassurance measure and to generally aid everyone's efforts for hand hygiene.

Staff are encouraged to use their own personal face coverings and hand sanitiser, as long as these do not compromise other control measures provided for health & safety. Care and attention should be given to

using and disposing of these appropriately. The University's policy on use of face coverings is kept under frequent review and further details can be found [here](#).

Outbreaks

Case/contact management is being undertaken centrally on cases reported to the University. All cases should be reported via the online reporting form available [here](#) for staff and [here](#) for students. Schools and Functions should not undertake local case/contact management without liaising with the central Case Management Team Covidcasemgt@reading.ac.uk

If a severe outbreak depletes the University's capacity to respond to emergencies or Major Incidents then some activities, including research, may be further restricted to reduce overall corporate risk from unplanned occurrences.

Measures Not Being Implemented

The University currently has no plans to measure body temperatures or use heat-sensitive cameras.

Managers are not expected to ask staff about their symptoms, except within the routine context of staff reporting in sick. Information about individual ill-health will typically not be publicised - the University's commitment to preserving confidentiality means there will normally be restrictions on what information can be shared, even when managers respond with action around absence, cleaning and social distancing.

Where handwashing facilities already exist there is no plan to change air-blowing dryers or paper-towel dispensers.

Strict segregation or "bubbling" of teams is not currently required in all teams, but is being implemented where appropriate.

The University will keep its response to Covid-19 and this guidance under review.