

## Safety Note 76

5th Edition, August 2021

# COVID-19 RISK-REDUCTION

Revised with significant amendments highlighted.

Amended to include changes applicable for the 2021 Term Autumn.

## Contents

Introduction .....	1
Risk Assessment and Induction .....	3
Avoiding Interaction .....	4
Ventilation .....	4
Reducing the Density or Duration of Interactions .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Signs & Physical Control Measures .....	6
Control of Risk from Surfaces .....	6
Enhanced Cleaning .....	7
Other Behavioural Controls .....	7
Monitoring, Review and Reporting Concerns .....	8
Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Hand Sanitiser .....	8
Outbreaks .....	8
Measures Not Being Implemented .....	8

## Introduction

The Major Recovery Team has approved a revised package of corporate control measures to be applied from early September and throughout the 2021 Autumn term. Importantly, many controls remain the same. The Corporate-Level Covid-19 Risk Assessment will continue to be reviewed and updated by the Major Recovery Team as necessary (available [here](#)). Common Areas Plans (CAPs) will be retained or kept in reserve for now. 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 use the Covid-19 re-induction modules on [UoRLearn, which are being reviewed and amended in preparation for the Autumn Term](#). Staff involved in delivering or supporting teaching are expected to also complete Covid-19 teaching induction module 3 on UoRLearn.

Some control measures have changed, in particular social distancing of minimum 2m is no longer a default requirement across all University work activities. However, there are still many measures, including maintaining their distance from others, which managers and staff are encouraged to use to reduce the risk of transmission of the Covid-19 virus.

The overall package of controls is intended to provide protection for all, including those who are clinically more vulnerable than others. Where staff have declared themselves as clinically vulnerable or extremely vulnerable then local approaches should consider their needs.

In addition, the University strongly encourages vaccination, both as a protection for vaccinated individuals and to reduce transmission to others.

This 5<sup>th</sup> 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 \(all being reviewed in August 2021\)](#). Consult your local Health & Safety Co-ordinator (HSC) for advice on interpreting and applying University guidance in specific circumstances.

During the Covid-19 pandemic the University will continue to manage its work activities in accordance with UK Government regulations and advice. When University restrictions and rules change they are being communicated to staff and students. For the latest see [these webpages](#).

### Fundamentals

- 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 their symptoms are mild and even if they achieve a negative result from a Lateral Flow Test**. They should stay away and promptly seek a PCR test.
- It is expected that the gradual and controlled return of the workforce to campus will continue in the Autumn Term
- **Staff who believe they are clinically more vulnerable than others are encouraged to declare this to their line manager to seek agreement on any tailoring of arrangements. Referral to Occupational Health is strongly encouraged.**
- By local agreement with their managers some staff may continue to work at home.
- **While the default requirement to achieve 2m distancing on all work activities has been lifted, those working on campus should continue to be sensitive to the preferences of others, and may in many instances maintain distancing through behaviour and local arrangements.**
- All formal and larger meetings should continue to be digital first. Smaller and ad hoc meetings can take place in-person subject to dynamic risk assessment
- Interactions can be made lower risk by **increasing the distance** between people, **reducing the time** people are close and meeting outdoors - brief passing interactions are lower risk.
- Items such as perspex screens and hand sanitiser stations will largely be kept in place for now. **Other local Covid-19 arrangements can be retained or kept in reserve to allow the University to revert to them should this becomes necessary.**
- 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.
- Eligibility Criteria indicating which **Events** are currently allowed on campus are being published within the FAQs on the Staff portal [here](#).
- Free Lateral Flow Tests continue to be available for staff to use twice per week

### 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, then the

University expects staff to follow those instructions and inform their line managers. Self-isolation cannot be achieved on University property (other than in residential spaces).

Clinically extremely vulnerable people in England are currently not instructed by the Government to shield. Further UoR guidance is available [here](#) and Government guidance is available [here](#).

## 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 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 at this time. 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. 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 Covid-19 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 [here](#), and advice for the HE sector is available [here](#).

**Local induction remains important for both those returning to an environment after an extended break as well as for new starters.** 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.

Monitor the implementation of corporate and local arrangements in your local workplace to identify if they are not working as intended and take remedial action - see below. Local Health & Safety Committees should continue to monitor the completion of risk assessment and the implementation of risk controls.

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

### Research

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/Director of Health & Safety Services. 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 on Covid-19 and teaching accessible via [here](#).

## Managing Interaction

Continue to manage a gradual return from working-at-home to working-in-campus, for those workers to whom this is relevant. Arrangements which have been developed over the course of the pandemic to reduce in-person interactions should be kept in reserve or retained where this is compatible with business needs. Larger formal meetings should be kept online where possible. A generic meetings risk assessment has been provided to help staff make their own decisions about organising in-person meetings. This is available from the [HSS risk assessments webpage](#).

Staff approved to work on campus can return to work and other staff can visit. Caution should still be used in admitting significant numbers of casual visitors, unless there is confirmation they have been briefed on the University's expectations and control measures.

Lifts should still be reserved for those with a genuine need arising from disability (including invisible disabilities), injury, illness, pregnancy 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.) Signage to reinforce this message should be visible at the approach to lifts, instructions about lifts should be included in local inductions and all staff and students should continue to heed this restriction.

To reduce anxiety to others, minimise use of corridors for casual gatherings or ad hoc conversations. Arrangements which have been developed over the course of the pandemic to reduce or minimise congestion and loitering should be kept in reserve or retained where this is compatible with business needs.

Where especially low occupancy raises concerns about lone-working please see Safety Note 75 on low occupancy buildings.

While brief passing encounters are lower risk, continue to use one-way systems where these are being retained for now. 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 physical changes may be made which would impact on emergency escape routes without explicit approval from the Fire Safety Advisor on [safety@reading.ac.uk](mailto:safety@reading.ac.uk), telephone 0118 378 8888.

Fire drills were temporarily halted. Refresher fire safety modules are available on UoRLearn, to remind staff and students of fire escape procedures and the location of fire alarm activation points, extinguishers, escape routes and emergency exits. **Fire drills will be resumed in the Autumn Term.**

## Ventilation

Optimise ventilation by using windows and doors (see below on keeping fire doors open). Establishing a crossflow can be especially helpful, by using using high and low openings, or ones across a space. In centrally-booked teaching spaces stickers on windows indicate where they can and should be opened.

Since 2020 ventilation has already been significantly enhanced in many areas. Mechanical ventilation systems typically run at below full capacity, but during the pandemic have been adjusted to run at maximum. Also, many systems were configured to recycle a proportion of air flow back into the building, for energy and comfort reasons. These have been switched to supply fresh air only.

Advice from UK Government scientists is that in most settings, for ordinary activities, where ventilation achieves current conventional building design standards, the risk of covid aerosol transmission is likely to be low. Higher rates of ventilation are likely to be appropriate for higher risk activities (such as choir singing and aerobic exercise), but typical teaching and office work are not higher risk activities and conventional levels of ventilation are likely to be adequate. So, for most spaces and activities the priority for risk assessment is to identify any areas of the workplace that are usually occupied but genuinely poorly ventilated.

HSE advice is to look for areas where people work but there is no mechanical forced ventilation and no natural ventilation such as openable windows, or doors or vents which connect directly to the outside. Also look for areas that feel stuffy or smell bad, or have unexplained, unusually high humidity.

To provide additional assurance, the centrally- bookable and School-controlled teaching spaces on the Autumn timetable have been assessed using a dimensions-based calculation method. Where necessary capacity limits were lowered to ensure ventilation was adequate for the occupancy. This calculation method was then validated in a sample of rooms by using calibrated carbon dioxide monitors which, when used appropriately, can provide a proxy indicator of ventilation.

This validation exercise demonstrated that the calculation method does provide a high level of confidence these spaces are adequately ventilated, as long as users open windows as sign instruct. It is important people take responsibility and use these means for risk reduction which are already available.

Teaching spaces not on the Autumn timetable, but needed for the Spring timetable, are yet to be assessed through this calculation method. That will get underway when necessary specialist resources become available. Validation on those rooms can only be carried out once teaching is underway, but confidence is now high as the calculation method has already been proved out as reliable.

There is no plan to undertake the calculation method assessment throughout all offices and other non-teaching spaces as this would not be reasonably practicable. Offices can and should be locally-assessed qualitatively, using the HSE's advice. If you become aware of spaces which have no mechanical (forced) ventilation and no windows, or they have an unexplained musty smell or excessive unexplained humidity, local management can judge these spaces are unsuitable and should not be usually occupied, with people working in them for hours. Advice from the local HSC can be sought, but higher approval is not required to take such spaces out of use.

Offices which do have mechanical ventilation or openable windows, which don't smell bad, and where staff are spaced at least 2m from each other are likely to provide adequate ventilation, and risk is likely to be low. If local management judge necessary, they can impose other restrictions such as limiting occupancy. This may mean slowing down the rate at which staff can return from working at home. If any HSC needs additional advice they should contact their Liaison Advisor in HSS.

In spaces where ventilation is evidently low but only small numbers of people visit, and then only briefly, for example a storage space, those spaces can continue to be used if other methods to reduce risk are used. For example, storage spaces can continue to be used if you only allow brief essential visits, one person at a time, the door is propped open throughout, etc.

Staff with concerns should raise these with their manager in the first instance. Any staff member who is already utilising all available windows but remains concerned about ventilation can, as normal for any H&S issue, submit a H&S notification using the [online H&S incident form](#). Ventilation concerns notified via this

route will go through the normal process, typically being passed to the local HSC for consideration and an appropriate level of investigation.

### Fans

Where ventilation is adequate it is acceptable to use fans to assist the general circulation of the fresh air coming into that space. However, if a space is found to be poorly ventilated then that space should not be usually occupied, regardless of any fan. Simply adding a fan is not likely to make it into an adequately ventilated space.

## Signs & Physical Control Measures

Retain signage to communicate workspace-specific arrangements. Retain already installed clear or opaque screens or panels to provide protection from inadvertent sneezes, coughs, etc.

## 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.

**In local inductions,** remind every worker that handwashing is a demonstrably effective control measure against transmission of Covid-19. Ensure access to suitable handwashing facilities - 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.

**Options already implemented to reduce touch contacts should be kept in reserve or retained where this is compatible with business needs.** 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. HSS has dedicated hand sanitiser stocks for disabled staff for this purpose.

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.

To reduce residual risk enhanced cleaning regimes are in place (see below).

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.

Eating or drinking can create aerosols and these activities should still 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 Services colleagues, and to help them implement cleaning regimes effectively.

### Water Fountains

Mains-fed water dispensers/fountains which were taken out of use are being gradually brought back into service through a project being managed within Estates. Requests for specific devices to be brought back into service early should be passed through the local HSC, who can contact Rachel Odame or the Estates Helpdesk (x7000).

### Post

Postal Services continue to store on request incoming items at Whiteknights House where carriers can't gain access to other buildings, otherwise they are delivered to the usual building delivery points on regular daily rounds. Items for despatch are collected on these rounds but can also be brought to Whiteknights House. Please let Postal Services know when you intend to bring items for despatch or to collect. The Mail Shop remains closed for personal mail.

### 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.

Continue to wear face coverings where these are required in minibuses and on public transport.

## 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.

Fieldtrips etc continue to require their own risk assessments, including addressing the hazards and required controls for Covid-19.

## Monitoring, Review and Reporting Concerns

Staff should report social distancing issues or concerns with their line managers. Managers should respond appropriately to concerns, seeking advice from the local HSC if needed. They should also proactively monitor the implementation of local arrangements.

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.

Local Health & Safety Committees should review the effectiveness of 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 Covid-19 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 continues to be undertaken centrally on cases reported to the University. All cases should still 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](mailto:Covidcasemgt@reading.ac.uk)

QR codes and attendance registers in teaching sessions, to assist with contact tracing, are under review.

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 and cleaning.

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 can be implemented where appropriate.

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