

EMPLOYMENT UPDATE

New COVID-19 guidance on office working

The UK Government introduced new regulations on the gradual easing of lockdown restrictions. As part of this, the Government updated the COVID-19-secure guidance for office settings. We set out below the key changes for employers and HR professionals.

Latest guidance

Can everyone go back to the office now?

Whilst there is now no legal requirement to work from home, it is still [Government guidance](#) that office workers should continue to work from home where they can.

This position remains in force until Step 4 of the [Roadmap](#), which is currently set at [21 June 2021](#).

What about employees who are finding it difficult to work from home?

Employers can and should consider whether home working is appropriate for workers facing mental or physical health difficulties or for those with a particularly challenging home working environment.

These individuals should be permitted to attend the office where possible. However, employers should still encourage a mix of home and office-based working where full home working is not possible.

There is no requirement that a worker be a 'critical worker' for this to apply.

Do these restrictions still apply if workers have been vaccinated?

Yes. All these measures must remain in place even if your workers have been vaccinated or have received a recent negative test result.

As an employer, you can register [here](#) for free rapid lateral flow tests from the Government if your employees cannot work from home.

Otherwise, your employees can also find out how to get a rapid lateral flow test to do at home or at a test site via the [NHS website](#).

If you would like any further advice or assistance on this new guidance, please contact our Employment Lawyer, Jamie Feldman (jamie.feldman@northridgelaw.com).

What about meetings?

- › **In general:** indoor meetings of any size, and outdoor meetings of more than six people, remain unlawful unless "reasonably necessary" for e.g. work.
- › **Encourage calls and video calls:** especially for meetings with external contacts.
- › **Social distancing:** should be maintained.
- › **Location:** outdoors, unless it is "reasonably necessary" to be indoors in which case it should be in rooms with good ventilation.

Steps to be taken by employers

Employers should consider the following steps when allowing workers to attend the office:

- › **Risk assessments:** where offices are open, a COVID-19 workplace risk assessment must have been carried out (and should be updated regularly).
- › **Travel to/from the office:** workers should walk or cycle if possible and avoid busy times/routes on public transport (and this may mean allowing for staggered start and finish times for staff).
- › **Monitoring:** as part of NHS Test and Trace, employers should keep a record of who is coming into the office (including visitors, not just workers).
- › **Regular cleaning:** if more workers must return to the office, consider increasing how often surfaces and other touch points are cleaned.
- › **Ventilation:** the latest guidance places emphasis on the use of ventilation (including air conditioning) to reduce the risk of transmission in enclosed spaces.

The guidance and regulations relating to COVID-19 are regularly updated by the UK Government. See this [Government webpage](#) for more info.