

## A Health Protection Guide to COVID-19 Risk Assessments

### What is a risk assessment?

A good risk assessment (RA) will help keep you, your business, your staff, volunteers, customers and community safe. A number of businesses in Sandwell have been driving the recent increase in cases in the Borough and some of these businesses have had to close for a fortnight to control these outbreaks. A robust risk assessment is the best way to ensure you don't have an outbreak in your business. RAs are live documents. They should be regularly updated following changes to government guidance and be based on best practice.

You are responsible for your risk assessment. In a COVID RA you must:

- identify what work activity or situations might cause transmission of the virus
- think about who could be at risk
- decide how likely it is that someone could be exposed
- act to remove the activity or situation, or if this isn't possible, control the risk

A RA has to be written by someone who knows the environment and can identify the hazards. It needs to be specific to the area and for the staff / the public using that area. It also needs to be communicated to all staff, who need to know what actions they need to take and these messages need to be repeated/reinforced regularly.

More information on the 5 steps to working safely during the COVID outbreak and sector guidance on risk assessment can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

### Common pitfalls:

Some common public health / health protection pitfalls include:

- Looking simply to return back to business as usual. Eliminating the risk is better than controlling a risk so first of all consider if you can do things differently (e.g. working from home)
- Risk assessment should not just be based on what to do now – plan also for a second wave
- Not involving the wider staff group – getting ideas from your staff will strengthen your RA, ensure ownership and increase the chance staff follow what is being suggested
- Not speaking to other companies / areas in your field – learn from each other to put these RAs together
- Over-reliance on PPE. Outside of health and social care, PPE is generally only required if it was required before COVID. If you staff didn't need to wear gloves and masks in 2019 they probably don't need to wear them now! (More info can be found here: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/ppe-face-masks/non-healthcare/index.htm>)
- Forgetting the importance of social distancing. The risk at 2 m is half the risk at 1 m. Social distancing is your most important control measure. Think about how you can maintain that, especially at choke points like entrances and exits.
- Messaging. It's important that people with symptoms / people who are contacts do not come into your workplace / setting. Think how you will get that important message across.

- Handwashing. How can your staff / visitors clean their hands? If they don't have access to a sink, consider other options such as providing alcohol-based hand gel.
- Cleaning. Frequent, regular cleaning is an important control measure. The virus that causes COVID-19 is easily "killed" with soap and water. But expensive gadgets such as fogging machines don't really have a role outside of hospitals. And any product that claims to keep something clean for several days / weeks is highly unlikely to be effective. If it sounds "too good to be true" it probably is!
- Don't forget about non-work. Where do your staff take their breaks? Can they maintain social distancing whilst eating lunch?
- Don't forget about the travel to/from work – this has been a major source of outbreaks in workplaces
- Stick/check local guidance for your settings were appropriate and make sure no gatherings outside your premises when numbers are restrictions. One-way systems and booking in advance for any events are good measures to manage large numbers.
- The fewer people that attend the lower this risk!

**Further information:**

More information on risk assessments including what to include and risk assessment templates can be found here: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/working-safely/risk-assessment.htm>

Up-to-date guidance on COVID-19 can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>