



FAQ's for Employers in relation to Home-Working on a temporary basis

What are the key duties of employers under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act?

Employers have specific duties to ensure the safety, health and welfare at work of all employees. These duties include the employee's workspace where employees are required to work from home.

Key duties that apply to the work activity and workspace include:

- managing and conducting all work activities to ensure, as far as reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare of employees,
- providing safe systems of work that are planned, organised, and maintained,
- assessing risks and implementing appropriate control measures,
- providing safe equipment including personal protective equipment, where necessary,
- providing information, instruction, training and supervision regarding safety and health to employees, and
- having plans in place for emergencies.

What duties do employees have under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act?

If you are an employee working from home, you have a responsibility to take reasonable care of yourself and other people who may be affected by the work you are doing.

Employees must:

- cooperate with their employer and follow their instructions,
- protect themselves and others from harm during the course of their work, e.g. take care of any equipment provided and report any defects immediately to the employer,

- report any injury arising from work activity to their employer immediately, and
- follow procedures that have been put in place by their employer.

What responsibilities do I have as an employer in relation to home workers?

Responsibility for health and safety at work rests with the employer whether or not that work is being done at the worker's home.

Employers need to consult with their employees to assure themselves:

- that the employee is aware of any specific risks regarding working from home,
- that the work activity and the temporary workspace are suitable,
- that they provide suitable equipment to enable the work to be done, and
- that there is a pre-arranged means of contact.

What equipment must I provide for my employees to enable them to work from home?

Equipment already in use in the workplace e.g. laptop, mouse, monitor, keyboard and headset could be used for temporary home-working. If the employer provides any equipment, it must be in good condition and suitable for the work activity.

Note: Suitable equipment already available in the employee's home can be considered for temporary work from there.

What questions do I need to ask employees in relation to their temporary home work space?

As an employer, you must determine whether the temporary home workspace is suitable for the work you want the employee to do.



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Examples of questions you could ask about the temporary workspace include the following:

- Do you have a suitable space to work from temporarily?
- Can you access the workspace easily and safely?
- Is there adequate light, ventilation and heat to allow you to work comfortably?
- Is there enough space to allow you to work without twisting, bending or sitting/standing awkwardly?
- Is there enough workspace to accommodate the equipment or other materials needed for the activity?
- Is the floor clear and dry, e.g., kept clear of electrical cables or anything else you could trip over / slip on?
- Is the workspace free of clutter?
- Are electrical sockets, plugs and cords in good condition e.g. no charring, exposed wiring or frayed cables?

As an employer what do I need to consider when preparing vulnerable workers, those with disabilities, or sensitive risk workers to temporarily work from home? (e.g. pregnant employees, young persons and those with mobility needs)

In requesting an employee from a sensitive risk group to work from home, the employer should consider the suitability of the person to the work in the context of their home working space. It is essential that work tasks and working conditions do not adversely affect the health of employees with a disability, pregnant employees, and young workers.

The employer should consider the following in relation to the employee's work and workspace:

- safe access to the workspace,
- the equipment necessary to complete the work,
- sufficient workspace,
- adequate lighting, heat and ventilation to allow comfortable working,

- adequate breaks,
- regular contact,
- emergency contacts and procedures.

Further information on Sensitive Risk Groups can be found here:

https://www.hsa.ie/eng/Workplace_Health/Sensitive_Risk_Groups/

What do I need to consider where employees are using computers and digital technology when home working?

Employees should be given information on issues associated with the work to be undertaken at home. For temporary home working the following should be considered:

- varying work tasks to ensure that employees are not working in the same position for long periods of time,
- advising employees to review where the screen is located e.g. situated away from window so as not to cause glare,
- placing equipment so as to minimise twisting or overreaching,
- having enough work space for the equipment and any other materials needed to carry out the work,
- encouraging employees to take regular breaks and to stand and move for one minute every hour.

For further information use our 'Position Yourself Well' guidance which can be given to employees working from home on a temporary basis.

https://www.besmart.ie/fs/doc/handout_cutout_for_web.pdf

What other general supports and means of communication do I need to put in place for home workers?

Working from home can result in employees feeling isolated, working longer hours and blurring the lines between work and family life. It is important that employees know they have support at all times during working hours.

Employers should consider the following:



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- ensuring all contact details for employees are on file and agree means of contact,
- arranging regular updates via phone, web or email with each employee,
- providing employees with emergency contact numbers,
- arranging IT support in the event of technical problems where relevant,
- providing employees with information detailing when it is important for them to contact their employer,
- making sure work is organised in such a way that the employee takes regular breaks and can separate his/her work life and daily life,
- providing employees with regular feedback on their work,
- encouraging employees to maintain contact with colleagues.

Need Further Advice?

T: 1890 252 923 E: info@peninsula-ie.com W: peninsula-ie.com

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Top tips for home working

Staying fit and healthy through COVID-19 is vital for your physical and mental health. Here are our top tips to maintaining an optimally functioning immune system and protecting your wellbeing while working from home.



Food

A functioning immune system relies upon vitamins and minerals – particularly Zinc, vitamins A, C and D.



Routine

Start and close the day with a routine. Get dressed, go for a walk, prioritise your jobs.



Keeping in touch

This is the big one. We all need to talk to others. If physical contact isn't possible, use technologies like Skype, WhatsApp or Microsoft Teams (do this rather than phone - it is easier to see how someone is).



Monitoring as a manager

Think about the nature of the job, the individual and culture. Establish whether you need to measure and monitor hours, or output or both.



Workstation

You may not have the perfect workplace or equipment, but get a supportive chair, or consider a stand-up desk.



Work environment

Find a space away from the living room if possible and definitely not your bedroom. Try setting up near a window for natural light. A plant helps.



Communicate

Managers, don't be too task-focused. Ask how someone is and be genuinely interested in the answer. Life is messy (especially right now) and we need to embrace this.



Regular breaks and exercise

Every 25 minutes, get up and stretch, breathe, go outside, or go up and down the stairs - anything to move your body.



Fresh air

Get out of the house once a day for a walk, run or cycle, while maintaining the government recommendations on social distancing.



Minimise distraction

We produce much better work when we are focused on one thing. Move your phone out of the way and get rid of all the apps which distract you.

Ensure you wash your hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, drying them thoroughly. Use alcohol-based hand rub if you don't have immediate access to soap and water.

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Five exercises to do at your desk

Stay active and avoid aches and pains by practising these five exercises that can be done from your desk (or dining room tables) at home.

1

Leg extensions

While sitting on a chair, lift one of your legs until it's straight out in front of you. Hold for as long as you are comfortable, then lower and lift the other leg. Repeat 10 times. Try counting how long you can keep your legs raised, and see if you can increase the time a little each day. Next, lift one foot a few inches off the floor, keeping your knee bent at 90 degrees. Again, hold until it becomes uncomfortable then switch to the other leg.

2

Shoulder rolls

Starting in a position of proper alignment, roll your shoulders up, then back, then down in a fluid motion. Repeat this movement 10 times, and then reverse it, rolling forward 10 times.

3

Neck rotations

Relax your shoulders and lower your chin until it touches your chest. Take a deep breath in while rotating your head very slowly clockwise. When your head is as far back as you can get it, slowly begin to exhale while circling your head back to rest your chin on your chest again. Do this five times clockwise, then five times anti-clockwise to relax and stretch tense neck muscles.

4

Back twists

Sit up straight and put your left hand on the small of your back, with your elbow bent. Twist to the left as far as you can comfortably. Change to the right side and repeat. Keep switching from side to side and always move slowly and smoothly. Don't jerk or force yourself to twist further than is comfortable.

5

Punch the air

Punch the air above your head with both arms for intense 30-second bursts - it's a great way to release stress and get your heart beating faster. Next, punch the air in front of you, then to the sides and finish with 30 seconds overhead again.

Here are some additional tips for moving more when you're working from home:

- Instead of sitting for phone calls, stand up and walk around as you take them.
- Don't keep water on your desk, walk to the kitchen to get a drink whenever you feel thirsty.
- Get active on your lunch break by going for a walk, run or doing a 20-minute YouTube workout.

For further support and information, contact our Health & Safety advice line on: **1890 252 923**



Introduction

This guidance has been prepared to cover the current situation (March 2020) with Coronavirus (COVID-19). There is an increasing demand for employees to work from home where possible. This guidance indicates the minimum health and safety requirements to ensure employees can safely work from home.

Legal Duties

An employer's legal duty to protect and monitor the health, safety and welfare of workers extends to employees working from home. Consequently the same health and safety requirements apply to home workers as to office based staff. In summary the employer must do what is reasonably practicable to ensure the health and safety of their workforce whilst at work and of others who might be affected by the work activity.

Recognised Control measures

Before an employee begins to work from home, you should carry out an initial assessment of their proposed working area to determine the specific hazards and risks posed to each individual home worker. Form **HWVC-Short Term**, attached, can be used to guide this initial assessment. If the situation dictates that the employee must work from home to care for dependents or due to self-isolation, temporary measures should be put into place. Employers should periodically check that the working conditions continue to meet the legal standards. The temporary working arrangements will need review after two weeks to ensure the conditions are suitable. A structured discussion with the employee will be sufficient, provided that action is taken where issues are identified. Keep a record of the discussion and any actions taken. Further formal review should take place at monthly intervals should temporary home working continue for more than 4 weeks.

Employees should designate an area of their home as their workstation e.g. a desk, home office, dining table or 'foldaway' desk that will be well lit and is ergonomically sound for their use; see Guidance Note 5-11. They should be advised not work from places such as an arm chair, sofa or bed where the viewing angle of a laptop would not

be correct, where their wrist would not be supported and they will be at increased risks of work-related upper-limb disorders and eye strain.

The use of a ‘display screen equipment self-assessment’ questionnaire (see Guidance Note 5-11 – Display Screen Equipment) which should be completed by the employee may be helpful in ensuring the workstation is right for them and will present no physical hazards. Due to the developing COVID-19 situation long-term measures may not be immediately available and if temporary home working becomes prolonged the working conditions must be reviewed from time to time.

The employee should ensure their home working area is free from hazards that could be a foreseeable cause of slips and trips, for example trailing power supply and computer cables. Cables should be safely routed, fitted with a cable cover or taped down.

For temporary home working, laptops are a convenient IT provision due to their size and convenience. They do, however, present hazards beyond those associated with desktop computers. It is not advisable to work all day on a laptop because the size of the keyboard and the size and position of the screen are more restricted than those associated with desktop computers. Employers should advise employees to take regular breaks and ensure they maintain the correct posture, see appendix 2.

The electrical components in a home worker’s house are not subject to the same testing requirements as an office building. This can be easily dealt with during the home assessment by ensuring that plugs are correctly wired, that cables are covered and undamaged, and, if not already part of the home installation, by providing circuit breakers for connecting work equipment to the domestic power supply. Work equipment should be shut down and switched off at the end of the working day. The home worker should be instructed to carry out basic visual checks on their electrical equipment to ensure it remains in good condition.

The company’s accident and dangerous occurrences reporting procedure should be explained to home workers, and they should report to their Managers any accident that occurs during their working time.

Home workers need to have suitable communication devices, telephones or e-mail facilities and arrangements made so that in the event of emergency, they can call for

help. Supervisors should be able to contact the employee at all times during working hours.

Home workers should have regular meetings with Managers and colleagues, via individual or conference calls, so that they can interface with the rest of their team, share problems, issues and concerns about their work, and keep abreast of developments in the business. This will help avoid issues relating to stress.

Employers need also to ensure that their Employer's Liability Insurance will cover home workers and give the home worker sight of the policy certificate. They must also provide statutory health and safety information to the worker. This may be an electronic copy of your employee safety handbook.

With these measures in place, an employee's health and safety during home working can be effectively monitored and the employer can be assured that the employee has adequate safety systems in their place of work.

Remember to keep records of home working assessments and the actions you take to monitor the working conditions of your home working employees. Keep these with Safety Records or in personnel files.

Should the situation change or become longer term then additional controls should be applied to provide suitable conditions for long term working.

Further advice and guidance on any of the issues associated with home working or the advice contained in this guidance note is available from our 24-Hour Advice Service.

- In Great Britain call 0844 892 2785 or 0844 892 2772 option 2;
- In Northern Ireland call 0844 892 2786 option 2; or
- In the Republic of Ireland call 01 855 5050 option 2.

Our Guidance Notes are regularly revised and updated to reflect current best practice and take account of revised standards or legislation. The latest version of every Guidance Note is always available to you at www.peninsula-online.com.

SHORT-TERM HOME WORKING VIABILITY CHECKLIST

Form HWVC-ST

Use this form assess the viability of short-term working from home and the suitability of the home workplace..

PART 1. Business viability of home working.

Person being assessed for working at home.

	CONSIDERATIONS	Check box if YES	COMMENTS, REQUIRED	ACTIONS
1	Will service needs or customer demands be affected?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
2	Will home working have? Has the employee been required to self-isolate or temporarily care for a dependent?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
3	Is it possible for the individual's work to be done in the home environment and without a significant impact on business efficiency?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
4	Are there implications for the supervision and monitoring of the employee's work and is the individual self-disciplined and able to work without close supervision?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
5	Does the employee have suitable accommodation at home, i.e. a workstation free from distraction?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
6	Does the Company need to supply suitable IT and other equipment for the employee?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
7	Can the IT equipment be connected to a broadband link?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
8	Does the employee need access to files that should not be taken home?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
9	Is working closely with the team or colleagues in other Departments a key element of the individual's work?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
10	Are there any safety implications for work colleagues?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
11	Will the individual's work activities have to be reviewed or changed in order to accommodate home working?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
12	Will special arrangements be required contact the employee?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
13	Will H&S hazards and risks be properly controlled?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
14	Is the employee a suitable candidate for working at home?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
15	Have you set up suitable terms and conditions for short term working at home?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
16	Does your Employers' Liability Insurance cover include employees working from home?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
DECISION		Home working is viable	<input type="checkbox"/>	
		Home working is not viable	<input type="checkbox"/>	
COMMENTS				
Signed		Title		Date
Where short-term home working is approved use Part 2 to complete an assessment of the health and safety risks to the worker whilst working at home.				

PART 2. Use this checklist to assess health and safety risks to the worker when working at home short-term.

CHECKLIST FOR HEALTH AND SAFETY REQUIREMENTS FOR HOME WORKING			
	CONSIDERATIONS	Check box if YES	COMMENTS, ACTIONS
1	Employee briefed on suitable temporary workspace setup arrangements – See guidance note 1-18ST	<input type="checkbox"/>	
2	Is there suitable furniture, ICT equipment and materials for the job to be carried out satisfactorily and safely?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3	Have you ensured that suitable space for working, storage, security and confidentiality of information is in place?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
4	Have you taken reasonable care to ensure that the employee has a safe working environment in a comfortable ergonomic position, that suitable breaks will be taken and that they will not work beyond their contractual hours?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
5	Does your accident procedure include arrangements for home workers?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
6	Has the employee been briefed on the arrangements for routine management contact and emergency contact?		
ELECTRICAL AND OTHER EQUIPMENT			
7	If required, have you provided suitable electrical equipment that is in good order and regularly maintained?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
8	Has any electrical equipment been subject to Portable Appliance Testing (PAT) by a competent person?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
9	If you have provided computer equipment, has it been set up as a Company computer with broadband access to company networks?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
10	Are arrangements in place to ensure compliance with your company's information management, security and data protection policies?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
GENERAL			
11	Are arrangements in place to ensure that home workers receive any necessary health and safety training?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
12	Have you arranged suitable public liability and extra equipment insurance cover on company equipment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
COMMENTS			
Name of Person completing this checklist		Date	
Signed			



DISPLAY SCREEN EQUIPMENT

Set Up Guide

1. Arms

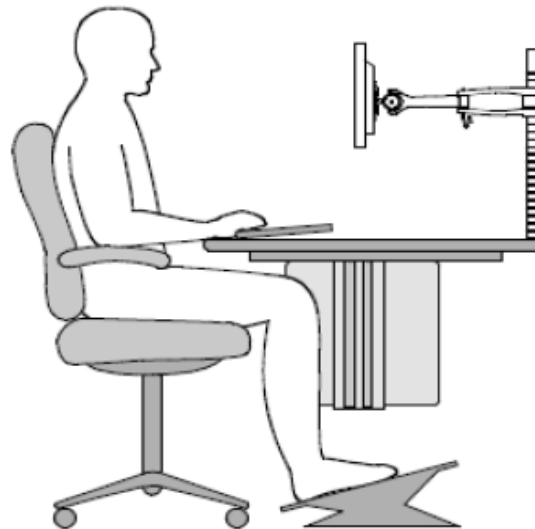
Ensure your elbows are level with the keyboard when sitting at your desk. This will position your wrists at the correct angle.

2. Getting Comfortable

Ensure your feet are flat on the floor with your knees at a minimum angle of 90 degrees. If you cannot place both feet flat on the floor whilst sitting right back in your chair, you need a footrest. Adjust your chair to support your back.

3. Head and Neck

The very top of the screen should be level with your eyes, in your line of sight. The screen should be directly in front of you; it should be an arm's distance away when you are sitting in an upright position.



4. Keying In

Leave sufficient space in front of the keyboard for hands and wrists. Your keyboard should be positioned towards the front of your desk to avoid overreaching and your mouse should be on the same platform (at the same level - next to your keyboard).

5. Reviewing Documentation

Any documents being used in the course of your work should be at the same level as the screen, on the same side as your dominant eye.

6. Overreaching

Items in frequent use, such as telephone, stapler, pens, etc. should be placed within easy reach.

Ensure that the equipment, the contrast, brightness and colour, is correctly set. Alternate your tasks to avoid stressors such as eye strain and fatigue.