



REOPENING YOUR WORKPLACE

Guidance Notes and Frequently Asked Questions

As the government has now published its Roadmap to Reopening Business and Society, you should have a clearer idea of when your business operations can resume.

The timelines will vary depending on what industry you're in, but it is a good idea to begin planning for reopening because whenever you reopen your business, you will do so with a changed workforce and a new set of employment challenges.

The principal challenge which should inform all your decisions will be ensuring that workers have full confidence that their health will be protected.

The government also published the Return to Work Safely Protocol on Saturday 9th May. This document sets out mandatory health protection measures that all businesses need to implement as part of the national effort to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

To help you meet the challenge of reopening head on, we've prepared the following replies to frequently asked questions.

What is the Return to Work Safely Protocol?

The Return to Work Safely Protocol is a government document outlining various measures aimed at mitigating the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace.

The Protocol is mandatory and all employers will need to put all relevant measures into practice. Broadly

speaking, this will mean all businesses will need to adapt their workplace procedures and practices to some extent or another to comply fully with the new public health protection measures.

The document sets out in clear terms the steps employers and workers must take before a workplace reopens, and while it continues to operate.

What are my obligations under the Return to Work Safely Protocol?

The main employer obligations under the protocol are:

- Appoint a lead worker representative to ensure buy in with staff.
- Develop a COVID-19 response plan.
- Develop a procedure to identify and isolate symptomatic employees.
- Update employment policies and inform staff.
- Have employees complete a return to work form confirming their health status.
- Put plans in place to ensure hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene and physical distancing.

The full details of the protocol are beyond the scope of this document and expert health & safety advice is recommended to ensure full compliance with the terms of the protocol. These measures are



mandatory for all businesses and will be enforced by the HSA.

Which employees should return to work first?

It is unlikely for most businesses that all employees will be able to return to the workplace at once. You should consider what employees, departments, groups, or units should return first based on business needs,

compliance with ongoing restrictions regarding “essential business,” and compliance with health precautions such as social distancing. The legitimate business reasons behind your selection of what employees return to work first should be documented to provide evidence of non-discriminatory selection criteria if later challenged.

Can I allow employees to continue to work remotely?

Yes. You should consider which employees may be able to continue to work remotely to allow those who need to be in the workplace to practice social distancing. Establishing flexible worksites will assist increasing the physical distance among employees. Additionally, we anticipate that many employees may request to continue working remotely despite employers reopening worksites. You should consider in advance how you will handle such requests, taking into account your obligations to treat all employees equally under employment equality legislation.

Am I required to maintain new cleaning or hygiene regimes?

We recommend that you deep clean the workplace prior to any employees

returning, both as a containment measure, and to help employees feel more comfortable about returning onsite. If there is a skeleton crew in the workplace, try to contain those employees to a specific area while this deep cleaning process is underway so that the occupied area can be cleaned immediately prior to additional employees returning. Food should be removed from common areas and kitchen or break areas.

You may need to schedule daily or weekly deep cleans after employees return. A deep clean is advised whenever an onsite employee reports being positive or presumptively positive for COVID-19. You should provide disinfectants throughout the workspace for employee use in wiping down surfaces.

Am I obliged to provide personal protective equipment to employees?

If government guidelines dictate that employees require personal protective equipment, you should either reimburse employees if they sourced their own or provide it to employees.

If an employee fails to bring the issued personal protective equipment several times over a relatively short time frame, you should document their behaviour and use your internal disciplinary procedures to ensure it doesn't continue.

You will have to provide personal protective equipment to all relevant staff and ensure no one receives different treatment.



PENINSULA

Will I need to update my risk assessment?

Most definitely. It is vital that you establish whether there are adequate safeguards in place to reduce the risk of employees contracting the virus, particularly those employees who may be particularly vulnerable to contracting the virus (e.g. employees with pre-existing respiratory issues, older employees, employees who are pregnant).

Some people might feel they do not want to go to work if they're afraid of catching coronavirus. This could particularly be the case for those who are at higher risk.

You should listen to any concerns staff may have and take steps to protect everyone.

For example, they could offer extra car parking where possible so that people can avoid using public transport.

If an employee still does not want to go in, you may agree to allow them to arrange to take time off as holiday or unpaid leave.

If an employee refuses to attend work without a valid reason, you may need to consider disciplinary action.

Summary

The mass change to remote work was and continues to be disruptive and chaotic. However, the return doesn't have to be.

Now is the time to plan and prepare your strategy for repopulating your workplaces and ensuring the right

people regain access to the right places when it is safe to do so.

While there are still many unknowns, we should consider and prepare for a change in how we approach workplace access going forward. When the time is right, you can re-open your facilities and welcome your workforce and visitors back in an orderly, safe manner with minimal interruptions.

Contact the Peninsula Group

Occupational Health intervention and Employee Assistance Programmes are essential tools to effectively manage absence in the workplace, to support staff and to add value to your business. We can provide you with the details of Health Assured, a company who can provide such services. For further information please speak to your HR Expert and visit:

<https://www.healthassured.org/ie>

For all other queries call 1890 252 923 to speak with one of our HR and Health & Safety experts.

Need Further Advice?

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

W: peninsula-ie.com