RETURN TO WORK: OFFICES

Isle of Man Government guidance for office-based businesses

www.gov.im/coronavirus
We expect that this document will be updated as and when necessary. This version is up to date as of 21 May 2020.

The overall guidance remains that employers must take necessary steps for all employees to be able to work from home, and working from home should continue to be promoted.

In light of the move towards a medium term response, it is recognised that the effective operation over a sustained period might require some further onsite presence and businesses may wish to start considering how to phase back roles which are currently being performed remotely.

It is also recognised businesses may need to implement measures to effect necessary longer term social distancing operations such as desk reconfiguration and this may require additional facilities staff and professional trades to attend.

This document has been prepared by the Department for Enterprise, with input from Isle of Man businesses and industry bodies, and in consultation with Isle of Man Public Health and the Environment, Safety and Health Directorate.

This guidance is intended to enable businesses to decide on the best course of action in returning employees to an office environment. It is important to note that while restrictions are being lifted, this does not mean mandating a return and employers should consider a number of factors when planning their return. While some employees may be coping well with remote working, others may welcome a return to an office environment and consideration must be taken into account of employee attitudes and caring responsibilities as well as consideration of operational issues that will be alleviated through a return.

How to use this guidance
This document sets out guidance on preparing for a return to an office environment and how to work safely. It gives practical considerations of how this can be applied in the workplace.

Each business will need to translate this into the specific actions it needs to take, depending on the nature of their business, including the size and type of business, how it is organised, operated, managed and regulated.

This guidance does not supersede any legal obligations relating to health and safety, employment or equalities and it is important that employers continue to comply with their existing obligations, including those relating to individuals with protected characteristics. It contains non-statutory guidance to take into account when complying with these existing obligations.

Prior to returning employees to an office environment, a risk assessment must be undertaken by employers. An example template is available and can be used as a resource to supplement internal policies.

This will identify areas that require attention in order to comply with guidance.

Sharing your Risk Assessment

Consider sharing the results of your risk assessment with your employees so that they are confident in the measures in place to ensure their safety. An example notice poster can be downloaded to display in your workplace to show you have followed this guidance.
Office-based businesses

For all office-based businesses that have not been mandated to close, employers must continue to take all steps necessary to ensure their employees can work from home and should promote and facilitate working from home where feasible; however, employers may now consider where it is appropriate for employees to return on a phased basis to an office environment to enable the effective operations of the business on a sustained basis.

Employers must only allow employees into the workplace where it is safe to do so, and social distancing and hygiene measures have been implemented in accordance with this document.

Example businesses/services include
- Banking
- Corporate Service Providers
- eGaming
- Information and Communication Technology
- Insurance
- Legal and Accounting
- Other Financial and Professional Services
- General Office Administration
- Government Offices

Employee Guidance
If your employer considers that you may return to work, you may do so provided you are well, not experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 and neither you, nor any of your household is self-isolating.

If you are considered a vulnerable person (by virtue of age, underlying health condition or pregnancy), or you live with someone who is vulnerable, you should continue to work from home if at all possible and you should discuss with your employer a suitable arrangement for a safe return to the work place taking into account your situation. Employees, visitors or contractors must not attend nor enter the premises if experiencing symptoms of COVID-19. Employees must report their absence to their Line Manager or Human Resources so records can be maintained.
How to raise a concern

If you have concerns about the arrangements your employer is able to put in place to protect you, you should discuss with your manager in the first instance, or the Occupational Health Service (if your employer provides one). You may also benefit from advice from one of the following organisations:

DEFA’s Health and Safety
Work Inspectorate
Phone: 685881
Email: worksafe@gov.im

Manx Industrial Relations Service (MIRS)
Can help both employers and employees, providing practical and impartial advice on any employment matter.
Phone: 672942   Email: iro@mir.org.im

Before reopening

- Consider the level of cleaning needed to prepare, if the office has been fully closed then you may wish to consider having the area fully cleaned
- Check whether you need to service or adjust ventilation systems, for example, so that they do not automatically reduce ventilation levels due to lower than normal occupancy levels.
- Most air conditioning systems do not need adjustment, however where systems serve multiple buildings or you are unsure, advice can be sought from your heating ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) engineers or advisers.
- Opening windows and doors frequently to encourage ventilation, where possible.
**Provide clear guidance for employees**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guidance</th>
<th>Details</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discuss your return to work plans with employees to ensure that employees understand the process and when they are allowed access the office, either to collect items or to carry out work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ensure that employees understand the part they play and their personal accountability in the process and their responsibilities in returning to an office-based environment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communicate policies for situations in which an employee becomes unwell with COVID-19 symptoms on the premises.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ensure that employees know the process for sharing concerns or asking questions around return plans.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide clear guidance for employees on social distancing as well as displaying reminders around the office to ensure they are observed. Templates are available <a href="#">here</a>.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure that internal processes are in place to deal with non-compliance of social distancing through disciplinary procedures.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate to employees that in an emergency, for example, an accident or fire, people do not have to stay 2m apart if it would be unsafe.</td>
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</table>
## Staff Welfare

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Distance</th>
<th>Exercise social distancing at all times - employees must remain at least 2 metres apart from the public and each other.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mental Wellbeing</td>
<td>Wherever possible take the mental wellbeing of employees and their attitudes to return to the office into consideration, allowing a return on a voluntary basis. Wherever possible, take the childcare responsibilities of employees into account when determining a return to work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protect Vulnerable</td>
<td>Protect vulnerable workers by limiting or managing their return.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree suitable course of actions</td>
<td>If there is a situation where an employee considered a vulnerable person (by virtue of age, underlying health condition or pregnancy, or lives with someone who is vulnerable) has either requested to be allowed to return to work or is carrying out essential business activities that cannot be done remotely, the situation must be discussed and a joint decision making process in place (between employee and manager with support from Occupational Health if available, or GP if needed). This is so that the employer and employee both understand the mental and physical health implications of returning to an office environment. Once all parties agree on a suitable course of action, arrangements must be put in place to ensure that contact with the employee is limited, their personal work station is an appropriate distance from others (at least 2m), and that there are good arrangements for hand hygiene and environmental cleaning. Any shift changes and movements around the workplace must also be organised to minimise contact with the vulnerable employee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return to Work Procedures</td>
<td>Consider using procedures such as a 'return to work' induction questionnaire to understand employee attitudes and concerns in order to help with planning and return phasing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare Facilities</td>
<td>Ensure clear welfare facilities are in place to support enhanced hygiene regimes, providing additional hand washing facilities, and maintaining social distancing during meals/breaks. Restrict the number of people using toilet facilities at any one time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced Cleaning</td>
<td>Enhance the cleaning regimes for toilet facilities particularly door handles, locks and the toilet flush.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Suggested appropriate steps to implement social distancing

- Consider a phased approach to returning to work. You may wish to look at alternating weeks in the office for different groups, based on business needs.
- Minimise all face to face meetings and gatherings, continuing to use remote meeting facilities wherever possible.
- Encourage employees to regularly wash their hands with soap & water for at least 20 seconds (or using hand sanitiser gel if soap and water is not available).
- Ensure employees travel to and from work separately wherever possible to maintain social distancing and consider providing additional parking or facilities such as bike-racks to help people walk, run, or cycle to work where possible.
- Consider restricting all non-essential visitors and contact with the public, if this is not possible, you may wish to consider the use of PPE/masks.
- Consider that essential delivery persons/visitors may be high risk (due to the number of premises they have visited) and ensure that processes are in place to limit risk of cross contamination.
Monitor building access points to enable social distancing – you may need to change the number of access points, either increase to reduce congestion or decrease to enable monitoring as well as ensure that high contact areas such as door handles, hand rails and switches are thoroughly cleaned on a regular basis – the frequency of this will be dependent on individual circumstances such as number of employees in the office and traffic patterns and should be determined by businesses themselves.

Consider introducing staggered start/finish times for staff to reduce contact/congestion at all times.

Adjust office layouts and desk occupation to ensure that employees remain 2m apart when seated at workstations.

Consider staggering break times to reduce congestion and contact at all times.

Consider adjusting workstations or leave sufficient ones empty and where possible avoid desks being face to face, preferring diagonally opposite where possible.

If 2m spacing and avoiding placing desks face to face is not possible, you may wish to consider the use of Perspex screens.

Consider how the hygiene of communal areas such as kitchens and bathrooms will be managed.

Where shower/changing facilities are required, set clear use and cleaning guidance for showers, lockers and changing rooms to ensure they are kept clean and clear of personal items and that social distancing is achieved as much as possible.
Allow plenty of space (at least two metres) between people waiting to enter buildings (if feasible, consider installing 2m distance lines – similar to those seen in retail environments), consider how this can be done safely when access is directly onto a street where there may be pedestrian traffic, if it cannot be done safely, ensure that arrival times are staggered to avoid congestion.

Avoid hot desking wherever possible, if workstations do have to be shared between teams, ensure thorough cleaning takes place before and after changeover to avoid cross contamination, either by providing employees with the cleaning materials to do this themselves (wipes/sprays etc.) or by cleaning service.

Consider office footfall traffic patterns and circulation spaces to consider how you can reduce congestion and contact at all times, this may include making stairways and corridors one-way and limiting the use of lifts. If this is not possible (limited stairways), consider procedures to ensure usage maintaining social distancing, such as safe waiting areas if meeting traffic in stairways.

Multi-tenanted buildings

Discuss policies and procedures with building managers to understand individual responsibilities, social distancing and hygiene measures in place and communicate to staff.
If employees become unwell while on the premises

If an employee becomes unwell on the premises and believes they may have COVID-19, they must:

Go home, self-isolate and complete the online assessment tool (see: https://covid19.gov.im/). If their symptoms indicate possible COVID-19, the tool will advise them to contact 111. 111 will provide clinical assessment, offer testing if appropriate and provide guidance on self-isolation. If they are advised (through the self-assessment tool or 111) that the symptoms are not possible COVID-19, they do not need to self-isolate and can return to work when they feel well enough.

If they’re waiting to be picked up to go home, they should stay in a designated room at least 2 meters away from others and if possible open a window for ventilation. If the weather permits, remain outside but at least 2 meters away from others.

If a person falls ill, but confirms that they have not been near anyone confirmed to be infected by COVID-19, then the office does not need to close. The following guidance applies:

Whilst the unwell person remains in the office (waiting to be picked up to go home), they should be placed in a designated room at least 2 meters away from others and if possible open a window for ventilation. If the weather permits, remain outside but at least 2 meters away from others.

Cordon off the area that person was working in; an area 2m from each point around a workstation/desk would suffice. Cleaners should be contacted to clean all surfaces that the person has been in touch with as soon as possible (especially the cordoned off area and high-traffic areas such as, kitchens, communal break-out area, toilets, etc.).

If the person indicates that they have been near someone infected with COVID-19 or if they later test positive for COVID-19, the following additional guidance applies:

Arrangements should be made for the office premises and communal facilities to be temporarily closed to be decontaminated. Dependent on the cleaning process, in most cases the office will be able to be re-opened and functioning the day after the decontamination is carried out. High risk or close contacts of a positive case as assessed by the Contact Tracing Team will be contacted in order to advise and monitor them through the self-isolation period.
STAY SAFE

www.gov.im/coronavirus