

Loss prevention standards

Health and Wellbeing During COVID-19

Understanding the importance of maintaining health and wellbeing in the workplace during the COVID-19 pandemic. Advice on how to manage your employee's health and wellbeing.



Health and Wellbeing During COVID-19



Introduction

These are very challenging and uncertain times and businesses will be doing everything they can to keep operating to provide the services required and to keep their employees in employment. However, no one wants to see employees put at unnecessary risk or suffer long-term harm as a result of a short-term situation. Taking care of your employees' wellbeing is a key priority, as the situation around Coronavirus (COVID-19) and the advice changes.

As we adjust to a different way of working, we need to be more mindful than ever about how we work with each other, and how we manage our employees. The [World Health Organisation](#) (WHO) defines health as 'a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity'. Now more than ever does the importance of this ring true. Information on mental health and wellbeing is provided by Public Health England – [Guidance for the public on the mental health and wellbeing aspects of coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#).



All employees will be experiencing the stresses and strains of juggling home and work life. They may find themselves in a remote working situation for an extended period of time, isolated from friends and wider family and work colleagues.

There are key areas to consider during this period to enable safe and successful working, such as:

- Working as a team
- Leading in uncertain times and remotely
- Wellbeing, both mental and physical
- A changed working environment
- Leading virtual meetings
- Changes in technology
- Working remotely and balancing home life
- Developing a Wellness Action Plan

This Loss Prevention Standard explores the importance of health and wellbeing risk management during the COVID-19 pandemic and the benefits that can be gained in terms of organisational culture, health (physical and mental) and resilience in order to maximise resources during this challenging time.

Strategy: Develop and Adapt a Wellness Action Plan for COVID-19

Developing a health and wellbeing plan during the COVID-19 pandemic is important as it sets direction and gives guidance to all areas of the organisation. The content of these will vary from sector to sector depending on what the risk assessments for COVID-19 determine are priorities. For some it may be increased remote and homeworking, others increased lone working/working whilst social distancing. Key workers face particular challenges, dealing with the more vulnerable parts of our society such as the homeless, elderly, disabled or seriously ill or terminally ill individuals.

The mental health charity [Mind](#), have put together some advice and support to help manage wellbeing during COVID-19.

Physical Health and Wellbeing

Increased remote and homeworking along with increased workloads and home life pressures, e.g. home schooling during the pandemic, may adversely affect physical health and wellbeing.

Factors that may be worth considering include:

- Work activities undertaken that may negatively impact physical health and wellbeing due to changes in work practices during lockdown, e.g. sedentary roles, manual handling tasks, physically demanding roles
- Lifestyle factors – alcohol and drugs, smoking, eating and weight gain, etc. The pandemic has seen an increase in these negative coping strategies
- Homeworking: refer to Aviva Loss Prevention Standard [Homeworking](#) for more information
- Do not forget about non-COVID-19 related occupational disease exposures in the workplace, such as:
 - Excessive noise levels leading to potential work-related noise induced hearing loss
 - Hazardous substances that may lead to occupational diseases such as cancers, dermatitis, respiratory illnesses: see [workplace exposure limits](#) as part of COSHH produced by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE)
 - The use of vibratory tools and machinery - hand/arm vibration, whole body vibration conditions: see [Vibration at Work](#) - HSE
 - Physically demanding tasks that may lead to cumulative musculoskeletal disorders – carpal tunnel syndrome, tendonitis, tension neck syndrome, etc., see [Musculoskeletal Disorders](#) - HSE
 - Manual handling and repetitive tasks. Risk assessments will need to be reviewed due to social distancing requirements, e.g. lifting heavy loads where a 2-man lift is required

Maintaining physical wellbeing at work throughout the pandemic is important. Examples of good work practices that should be encouraged include:

- Time out – take a short break, this helps both mind and body to unwind and rest. Eat outside, go for a walk, get away from your desk or workstation. Consider introducing short regular breaks for those doing repetitive tasks where fatigue or boredom may set in
- Healthy eating – think about the range of snacks available during meetings or in staff canteens/restaurants. Introduce healthier alternatives wherever possible
- Healthier travel options – improve bike parking areas, improve local pedestrian and cycle routes as part of corporate social responsibility projects. Encourage ‘active’ commuting
- Gamification – make it fun to do something different to get the heart rate going – it could be a timed skipping rope session, who can do it for longest, or number of steps on an App. For more information see [Corporate Wellness magazine article gamification to make wellness fun and engaging](#)
- Building physical activity into the working day – examples include: scheduling meeting rooms away from the normal working location such as on a different floor, provision of on-site fitness facilities or subsidised memberships to local facilities, hold stand-up or walking meetings. Introduce a ‘Get Moving’ policy or standing virtual meetings when working from home
- Working hours – review the culture of the organisation – do managers encourage a long working hours culture where employees are sat at their desks for long periods of time, shift patterns, etc.? How could this be changed to give employees more time for physical activity during the working day or better rest periods between shifts? See information provided by the [Economic Research Council](#)
- Sleep deprivation and fatigue – **it’s important** for ‘resetting the button’ and clearing stressors from the previous day. Provide advice and support to employees. View 10 Sleep Deprivation Hazards on the Worksite issued by the [American Safety Council](#)

Mental Health and Wellbeing

According to the [Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development](#) (CIPD), early research into the health impacts of lockdown has revealed evidence of fatigue, musculoskeletal conditions, poor work life balance, reduced exercise and increased alcohol consumption. Employees have reported reduced motivation, loss of purpose, anxiety and isolation. Evidence from previous quarantine situations suggests that there are long lasting effects on mental health. These symptoms ranged from irritability and anger to depression and post-traumatic stress symptoms.

One of the most important things employees can do is to talk to people and share how they are feeling. Connect with colleagues and/or their manager (and managers must not forget to do this too!) and explain how changes, effects on their personal life, work allocated, or the situation is making them feel.

Managers and Senior Staff

Remember managers have feelings too and may be experiencing increased pressures and demands during the pandemic. As a manager, be empathetic, but accept the boundaries of what you are able to do for your staff. Take care of yourself; if as a manager, you are experiencing difficulties you may not be able to deal effectively with staff fears, so look after your own mental health and wellbeing. Have meaningful conversations with your peers and line managers, as we are all human beings. Individuals may find their mood and feelings are being affected making them feel low, worried or having problems sleeping due to pressures inside and outside the workplace at this time.

Encourage Routine and Wellbeing

It can be easy to fall into unhealthy routines. Eating healthy, well-balanced meals, drinking enough water, getting some natural sunlight or going outside for fresh air where possible, whilst avoiding smoking, alcohol and drugs can all be helpful. Also spend time doing things you enjoy – this might include reading, cooking, other indoor hobbies or listening to the radio, watching television programmes/box sets.

The old adage goes ‘**a problem shared is a problem halved**’, so **work together to find ways to address issues**. These ideas could be as unique as they are, because people are impacted differently.

Employees may feel the need for further support and any Employee Wellbeing Programme or Employee Assistance Programmes provided by organisations are there to help.

Many businesses provide ‘Apps’ to their employees. Wellbeing Apps are generally well received by employees, and these can include:

- Meditation and mindfulness by exploring guided exercises, videos and more to help people get healthier and happier. There are hundreds of articles for any mind, any mood and any goal
- Emotional recognition where people can understand their emotions, how to regulate them and learn to differentiate between helpful and unhelpful thoughts

A lack of sleep has been shown to be **detrimental to an individual’s** health. Encourage employees to maintain their sleep routine as during sleep our bodies repair themselves. The impact of sleepless nights is more than just bad moods and a lack of focus, it can also put people at risk of serious medical conditions. Further guidance can be found at the National Health Service (NHS) and through your occupational health provider, [click here to find out more](#).

Heavy workloads and management style are considered the top two causes of stress related absence in the latest [CIPD Annual Report 2020](#). Keep a close eye on staff absence rates and consider the pre-COVID data vs the post-COVID era, some trends may not be seen for many months.

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Stress Risk Audits

Organisations need to identify the key risks to **people's mental well-being**, for example, by conducting stress risk audits, and developing effective action plans to address them. Not enough organisations are equipping line managers with the knowledge and skills to support good mental health. This is why people professionals are still more likely to disagree than agree that managers have the skills and confidence required to manage mental health effectively. Consider:

- Developing meeting protocols to set boundaries around timings
- Encouraging appropriate breaks including lunch
- Monitoring diaries to check whether individuals are having back-to-back meetings
- Giving employees control over their diaries

Mental health needs when re-opening after lockdown will require careful thought. Things to consider include:

- Creating the 'new normal' work culture – new behaviours and attitudes will be seen
- Communication strategies for health and wellbeing
- Offering flexibility, e.g. allowing those who are nervous about returning to the office the option to continue to work from home
- Workload management
- **Dealing with employees' fears and anxieties around returning to work**
- Building resilience in the workplace, both organisational and personal resilience.
See [Petros – Resilience for Life](#)
- Management of pre-existing employee health conditions
- Being alert to burnout – educate managers in spotting signs early
- Monitoring staff holidays, are they still taking time away from work?

Looking out for your Team's Wellbeing

1. Really know your people
Getting to know your team is essential. What are their concerns and challenges and most importantly what is most important for them right now? Be able to spot deterioration in your team's mental health
2. Address fears and concerns
Encourage the team to focus on what they can influence, no matter how small and let go of what they cannot control/influence. This will give team members a focus and will stimulate empowerment over the things they can change
3. Check-in/be there
Check-in with them more often. When you do check-in, you need to sharpen your listening skills to try and read between the lines. Make it clear how and where they can get help if they need it
4. Ask twice
When asking 'how are you?', the response is often 'fine', almost as a greeting rather than saying how you actually feel. So, ask again – try a 'no really, how are you feeling, is everything ok, anything you want to share?' Time to Change is an organisation working to change the way we all think and act about mental health problems, [click here for more information](#). If someone does open up to you, depending on their issues you may have a number of tools that you can recommend to them, such as: Employee Wellbeing Programme, Employee Assistance Programme or Wellbeing Apps
5. Role model behaviours
Make sure you are role modelling the behaviours you want to see from your team, e.g. taking a lunch break, taking time for your mental wellbeing and being open about how you feel. Be approachable and encourage your team to ask questions

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6. Be open

Develop an open mindset; encourage feedback, look at things from everyone's point of view and help them learn how to respond to input from others

Measures to consider:

- Have you signposted employees to your Wellbeing policy and support documents?
- Are your managers having regular, e.g. weekly calls with their teams?
- Have you provided guidance on mental and physical wellbeing?
- Are you sending internal communications regularly to your employees to keep them up to date with your business?
- Have you advised employees about how to access your Employee Wellbeing Programme, Employee Assistance Programme or Wellbeing Apps?

Furlough and Redundancy

Don't forget about the mental health of furloughed workers, research indicates that even one day a week of work improves mental health, [click here for more information - ScienceDaily](#). Furloughed employees may have struggled the most with the loss of routine and lack of daily structure, and be more likely to lack motivation, feel worthless and lack purpose and job insecurity. They may also be suffering from financial worries and debts.

Continue to communicate transparently with furloughed employees throughout and maintain one to one conversations with their managers where possible. Consider offering professional development opportunities to furloughed employees to broaden their competencies and skills for when they do return to the workplace.

Key Workers

This group of employees are going to be particularly vulnerable to health and wellbeing issues post-COVID-19. This may be due to demanding workloads, burnout, traumatic events, the 'Hero' narrative that has been prevalent during lockdown and a feeling of helplessness when making decisions that may go against an individual's moral code and ethics. All these factors could have a negative impact on mental health and wellbeing in particular.

Communicate key messages regularly such as 'It's ok to be struggling', keep connecting with employees and managers at all levels. Encourage social cohesion amongst groups of workers.

The Role of Occupational Health

Whether occupational health services are provided in-house or via a third party, it is important to understand the value they add to the wellbeing piece, particularly now that businesses are re-opening after lockdown. Ask yourself:

- What services do they currently provide? Traditionally this has largely been focussed on legally required medical surveillance and absence management
- How much of the work they undertake is considered proactive, encouraging better workforce health and wellbeing?

Organisations need to look much deeper post-lockdown and consider support for those that may have lost loved ones to COVID-19 or still be suffering ill-health post-COVID-19 infection. Post-traumatic stress disorder may also be another issue that affects certain individuals as a result of the pandemic. Occupational health **specialists'** input will be invaluable at this time.

Opportunities Post-COVID-19

This is also a good time to consider how to re-design work, post-pandemic. There is a lot of discussion around what the world will look like in 1, 3, or 5 years' time. What will be the 'new norm'? Suggestions include:

- Flexi working
- Blended working
- Making the workplace a better place for all
- Looking at opportunities to improve working efficiencies, e.g. setting boundaries around meetings
- Looking to improve mental health 'literacy' throughout the organisation
- Extending root cause analysis tools to mental health illness incidents to discover what lessons and improvements can be made
- Not being afraid to experiment, creating a 'no blame' working environment where employees are empowered, and failure is considered acceptable

Checklist

A Health and Wellbeing During COVID-19 Checklist is presented in Appendix 1 which can be tailored to your own organisation.

Specialist Partner Solutions

Aviva Risk Management Solutions can offer access to a wide range of risk management products and services via our network of Specialist Partners who are reputable companies offering agreed discounted rates for Aviva customers.

For more information please visit:

[Aviva Risk Management Solutions – Specialist Partners](#)

Sources and Useful Links

- [Samaritans](#) – is a registered charity aimed at providing emotional support to anyone in emotional distress, struggling to cope, or at risk of suicide throughout the United Kingdom and Ireland, often through a telephone helpline
- [The Education Hub](#) - a list of free education resources
- [World Health Organization](#)
- [Gym-free workouts](#) – NHS
- [10-minute workouts](#) – NHS
- [Every mind matters](#) - NHS
- [Enterprise risk magazine - article on mental wellbeing-priority-during-lockdown](#)
- [Returning Safely](#) - IOSH

Additional Information

For more COVID-19 related Aviva Loss Prevention Standards see the following link:

- [Supporting you through COVID-19](#)

To find out more, please visit [Aviva Risk Management Solutions](#) or speak to one of our advisors.

Email us at riskadvice@aviva.com or call 0345 366 6666*

*Calls may be recorded and/or monitored for our joint protection.

Appendix 1 – Health and Wellbeing During COVID-19 Checklist



Location	
Date	
Completed by (name and signature)	

	Health and Wellbeing During COVID-19	Y/N	Comments
1.	<p>During the COVID-19 pandemic have you provided employees with support and guidance on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General health and wellbeing? • Occupational health and surveillance programmes? • Mental health and wellbeing? • Employee assistance programmes? • Employee responsibilities? • How to get support if needed? • Campaigns and education on COVID-19 related wellbeing topics? 		
2.	Have COVID-19 risk assessments incorporated health and wellbeing aspects?		
3.	Has the health and wellbeing policy, guidance and tools been reviewed and communicated to employees as a result of the pandemic?		
4.	Has the employee wellbeing/employee assistance programme contact details being issued to employees?		
5.	<p>Have managers been provided with guidance/information on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leading with health and wellbeing in mind? • Access to a manager's support network? • Signs of stress and burn out to look out for within their employees/themselves? • Guidance on coaching techniques and engaging their teams? • Setting meeting protocols? • Leading virtual meetings? • Supporting flexibility to enable employees to balance work and home demands? 		

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	Health and Wellbeing During COVID-19 Contd.	Y/N	Comments
6.	Has an organisation social network platform been provided for employees?		
7.	Are IT support able to provide support and equipment to homeworkers in a timely manner?		
8.	Has training been undertaken for managers, supervisors and employees around health and wellbeing topics during the pandemic?		
9.	Are regular communications being provided to employees about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updates in the organisation? • Health and wellbeing tips? • Not working excessive hours? • Support that is available? 		
10.	Additional comments:		

Please Note

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