

Guidance on Reducing Social Contact

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|--|---------------|
| Contents | Page 1 |
| Introduction | Page 2 |
| General Advice to minimise risks associated with Covid 19 | Page 2 |
| Reducing Social Contact in Offices | Page 3 |
| Access to and egress from buildings | Page 3 |
| Reducing Social Contact at Service Desks | Page 4 |
| Meetings & Training | Page 4 |
| Laboratories & Workshops | Page 5 |
| Exemptions | Page 5 |
| Latest Guidance | Page 5 |

Guidance on Reducing Social Contact

Introduction

This guidance has been produced to inform colleagues of the University's procedures to reduce social contact in offices in preparation for greater numbers of employees returning to the workplace following the lifting of Social Distancing restrictions from July 19th 2021 as part of the Government roadmap to recovery (Step 4). Prior to any return to campus following the period of restrictions, it is essential to ensure that returning staff are able to operate in a healthy and safe environment and that all returns must be in line with up to date Government regulations and guidance in relation to Covid-19.

Government guidelines from Step 4 are that social distancing guidance no longer applies and there are no limits on social contact between people from different households. COVID-19 can still be spread through social contact and therefore there is a shift of focus on maintaining sensible and proportionate controls to mitigate the risk of social contact, this document will also serve to provide additional guidelines aimed at preventing the spread of the coronavirus on campus.

General Advice to Minimise Risk Associated with Covid-19

Please remember that anyone who experiences Covid-19 symptoms should not come onto campus. You should self-isolate, inform your Line Manager and should seek medical advice immediately.

Managers of staff returning to work at the University should follow this guidance on reducing social contact to ensure we continue to work in a healthy and safe environment and be compliant with Government regulations and guidance in relation to Covid-19.

Remember to wash your hands regularly with soap and water for a minimum of 20 seconds. Coughs and sneezes should be covered with a tissue and disposed of immediately (into your elbow if no tissue) followed by the washing of hands.

Reducing Social Contact in Offices

Many staff work in open plan or communal offices that makes reducing social contact difficult to implement under normal practice. To overcome this Senior Management Teams should make arrangements, that include suitable and proportionate control measures, to reduce social contact in open plan and communal offices.

Following Guidance on Reducing Social Contact is an important control measure to help maintain a safe environment. From Step 4, there are no limits on social contact between people from different households. However, COVID-19 can still be spread through social contact. We can mitigate this risk by reducing the number of people our staff come into contact with. Managers should consider sensible and proportionate controls to mitigate this risk. Examples of ways to do this include:

- Splitting staff into groups or teams will limit the number of different people they encounter. Colleagues situated in open plan offices may be allocated to a red/blue rota for onsite working. Reducing the number of people each person has contact with by using 'fixed teams or partnering' for example the application of a staffing (Red/Blue) rota, so each person works with only a few others.
- Reviewing office layouts, using screens or barriers to separate people who sit opposite from each other, or using back-to-back or side-to-side working, instead of face-to-face (screens are only likely to be beneficial if placed between people who will come into close proximity with each other). To reduce social contact within offices we recommend that, where practicable, side-to-side or back-to-back seating arrangements are implemented. Direct face-to-face seating should be avoided where possible.

Scenarios across campus will differ but under normal working conditions, workers may need to pass others to get to their desks, and systems such as those suggested within this guidance aim to minimise the risk associated with Covid-19 as far as is reasonably practicable.

Where staff share an office space or desk due to working on alternate rotas, all surfaces, IT equipment and stationery should be wiped down before and after use by an individual and appropriate cleaning materials to sanitise desks, drawer handles, keyboards and mice before use each day and before leaving the office should be provided.

Access to and egress from buildings

Where safe to do so, the use of just one door for general access and one door for general egress to help control the flow of persons in and out of building has been considered, though building design and circumstances should be taken in to account. For example, in some areas it may be appropriate to use one door for

access and one (or multiple if deemed more appropriate) for egress at a single point whereas other buildings may use a doorway to the side of, or back of a building.

Fire doors should remain operational and only used in emergencies.

At all entrance points to buildings, information should be in place to remind persons of the social distancing that is expected to be adhered to.

It may be necessary to regulate entry so that buildings do not become overcrowded. Where hand sanitisers have been made available at access points or within buildings, you are encouraged to use these.

Reducing Social Contact at Service Desks

Many departments and teams across campus offer customer facing services such as receptions, library services, printing services and catering outlets. Within these areas, appropriate queuing arrangements should be clearly laid out for customers. Examples include, where to queue from, tape (or similar) on the floor. Railings, barriers or tape are required where longer queues are likely to form.

To ensure good practice, high contact surfaces such as service desks and communal computer equipment will be cleaned frequently. Frequency of cleaning should increase with increased usage but a minimum of twice daily is suggested where possible.

For those working behind the desks the University will provide appropriate shielding screens. These screens may be fixed or free standing, sizes and shapes will vary greatly depending on individual requirements. Senior Management Teams should liaise directly with Campus Services to identify the requirements within their individual areas.

Meetings and Training

Colleagues are encouraged to carefully consider whether face-to-face meetings are required, utilising Microsoft Teams or telephone conferencing when practicable. Numbers of attendees should be kept as low as practicable and even if the room allows for larger gatherings, these should be avoided.

The room should be suitably ventilated through-out the meeting with windows opened where possible.

Staying in same building that you work in for meetings is preferred to reduce social contact, however, it may be that 2 or more people are in different locations and under these circumstances handwashing/sanitiser should be used when entering a new building.

Laboratories and Workshops

For School specific areas such as workshops or laboratories, rather than a Campus-wide risk assessment, changes in the way work is done will appear in local Risk Assessments and Safe Systems of Work that must be updated as circumstances change.

Following an appropriate risk assessment, the University will introduce measures to enable work in laboratories and workshops, including research to be conducted in a safe and responsible manner, following government guidance specifically designed to protect researchers in laboratories and other research facilities and spaces.

Exemptions

Every effort should be made to fulfil the requirements of this guidance. However, there will be circumstances where for practical reasons minimising social contact cannot be achieved. For any tasks or activities where the above guidance cannot be followed a separate risk assessment will be required. Risk Assessments should be submitted to the health and safety centre for approval prior to the task or activity taking place.

Latest Guidance

This document will be reviewed at regular intervals to ensure that the most up to date advice and guidance is applied. Please make sure you are viewing the most up to date version of this document by checking the document control box at the end of the guidance and downloading the most up to date version from the [HR homepage](#).

See the links below for most up to date Government and Health and Safety Executive guidance:

Government Guidance

Keeping workplaces safe as coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions are removed

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