

Covid-19 individual risk assessment – Schools

Guidance for Headteachers

1. Introduction and Scope

Whilst it remains the case that wider government policy advises those who can work from home to do so, the government also recognise this will not be applicable to most school staff. Where schools apply the full measures within the government guidance on opening schools in September 2020, the risks to all staff will be mitigated significantly, including those who are extremely clinically vulnerable and clinically vulnerable. It is expected that this will allow most staff to return to the workplace, although those in the most at risk categories will need to continue to take particular care while community transmission rates continue to fall.

A risk assessment process needs to be undertaken for those employees who need additional consideration due to their having risk factors which make them more vulnerable to serious health complications as a result of Covid-19. These individuals fall into the following groups:

- Those who are clinically extremely vulnerable – (the shielded group)
- Those who are clinically vulnerable (this includes those who are over 70, have a medical condition on the vulnerable list, are pregnant, have a BMI of over 40)
- Those who have other risk factors which have been identified as increasing the risk of a poor outcome in the event of catching Covid-19 (this includes those in the higher age brackets, those from a BAME background and being born outside of the UK or Ireland)

A Covid-19 individual risk assessment has been developed for use in cases where individuals with one or more risk factors have been identified and they are required to return to work at school.

Where an employee with a vulnerability is able to continue to work effectively from home there is no need to complete an individual risk assessment at the current time but consideration should be given to undertaking a homeworking risk assessment.

2. Changes to shielding arrangements

The Government has announced that current shielding arrangements will be paused from 1st August, 2020. This means that, where previously these individuals were directed to remain at home, they may, from this date, return to a workplace provided the risks are assessed as acceptable.

It is important to note that shielding arrangements have been **paused** but not removed. In the event of a future local or national lockdown, previous shielding arrangements may be re-imposed. It is, therefore, important that employees within the shielded group can be readily identified to ensure any future changes can quickly and accurately be relayed to them.

We would therefore advise, that if they have not already done so, you request employees to provide you with a copy of the shielding letter(s) with which they have been issued. These letters do not include any clinical information and you should retain a copy on the employee's personal file.

For those within the shielded group, the return to a physical workplace may, understandably, be a cause of significant concern and anxiety. The process of risk assessment and adjustment will help allay concerns which employees have and enable them to return to their normal roles within

school. However, there may be a small number of situations where the risk of return to their role may still be too high.

3. Risk assessment process

The individual risk assessment should be completed for all employees working outside the home who have an identified risk factor.

The risk assessment should be a joint process between school leaders and employees with a full exploration of any concerns which employees may have. In some cases, employees might have information from their GP or other health professional to feed in. Where an employee wants to involve their union rep in the conversations, this should be accommodated if possible, but any meetings are informal and so there is no statutory right to representation in this regard and this shouldn't hold up conversations with employees.

The assessment is framed as yes/no questions; where the answer to a question is 'no' then no further action is required, where it is 'yes' control measures should be discussed and agreed. Control measures is the term used within risk assessments for the actions and arrangements which have been put in place to control the identified risks. You should list all your agreed control measures within the comments and actions section on the risk assessment.

3.1 Individual risk assessment

The individual risk assessment focusses on the individual, their additional risk factors and what adjustments are required to support the employee at work.

On completion of the individual risk assessment, school leaders should determine if they have assessed their employee as being low, medium or high risk. It is not possible to provide guidance on every eventuality and the assessment of risk will depend on the specific circumstances of the individual. For example, two people with the same medical condition may be assessed at different risk levels due to additional risk factors such as age, ethnic background, gender and BMI.

The objective is to make an overall assessment in line with this grid:-

Workplace Risk (with control measure)	Employee Risk		
	Low	Medium	High
Low	Low overall risk – monitor existing control measures only	Low overall risk – monitor existing control measures only	Low overall risk – monitor existing control measures only
Medium	Low overall risk – monitor existing control measures only	Medium overall risk – Review/add controls and monitor	Medium overall risk – Review/add controls and monitor
High	Low overall risk – monitor existing control measures only	Medium overall risk – Review/add controls and monitor	High overall risk – seek competent advice/ amend duties

As it suggests, this is based on the interaction of employee risk and workplace risk to give an overall risk factor.

3.2 Employee Risk

The following has been provided as guidance to help managers assess individual employee risk levels.

Risk rating	Definition	Workplace considerations
High	<p>High risk of hospitalisation, serious complications or death if infection occurs</p> <p>Likely to be those identified by NHS as extremely clinically vulnerable or those with multiple clinical vulnerabilities and/or other risk factors</p>	<p>Risks at work should be kept low by the implementation of and adherence to controls.</p> <p>Ensure low likelihood of anyone breaching social distancing.</p> <p>Ensure they can maintain good personal hygiene with low likelihood of contacting contaminated objects and surfaces</p>
Medium	<p>Risk of becoming hospitalised and seriously ill if infection occurs</p> <p>Likely to be those with a lower number of risk factors or clinical vulnerabilities</p>	<p>Risks at work should be kept as low as reasonably practicable by controls.</p> <p>May be able to undertake care work and working closely with others (such as teaching, sharing a vehicle, using public transport) provided controls (e.g. screens, face coverings) are effective in managing the risk</p>
Low	<p>Those for whom the risk of developing severe disease is low</p>	<p>An increased risk of infection may be accepted where there are no reasonably practicable means or reducing it further.</p> <p>Should be able to undertake all roles.</p>

Advice can be sought from Occupational Health around the potential impact of risk factors on individuals.

3.3 Workplace Risk: The impact of job role

The shielding arrangements have been paused from 1st August, so all employees who have been shielding at home may be required to return to work outside the home.

Whilst individuals will have their own risk level, this needs to be considered in the context of their job role. Different roles will carry different risks depending on a range of factors.

Headteachers are encouraged to think about the potential risk factors associated with a role and the following scenarios are provided as guidance:

Description of working arrangements	Considerations
Role based in an office or reception area where the contact with other employees and students is limited.	<p>Measures such as spacing of chairs and desks, one way systems are implemented. Also additional measures for individuals if required e.g. screens, staggered start times, etc.</p> <p>These would be considered low risk work environments suitable for all employees</p>
Role based in a classroom or other area involving contact with a variety of employees, students and members of the public	<p>These roles may be assessed as medium risk and controls should be formalised to minimise risks.</p> <p>Controls may include; one-way systems, social distancing where possible, provision of hygiene measures</p>

Role involving contact with a wide variety of employees, students, members of the public and the provision of personal care or medical procedures.	<p>Risk levels for such roles may be assessed as high.</p> <p>Risk assessment will need to include all relevant factors and whether suitable control measures can be put in place to reduce risks. Measures are likely to include PPE where appropriate.</p> <p>These roles are unlikely to be suitable for employees who are assessed to be high risk due to their vulnerability.</p>

3.4 Overall Risk

Where the overall risk is high, even after measures have been agreed, then advice should be sought via an Occupational Health referral to explore whether any further controls are possible.

Where the overall risk is medium, managers should consider whether additional control measures are necessary.

Where the overall risk is low, it is still important that existing control measures are maintained.

In all cases, individual risk assessments should be regularly reviewed to ensure they remain current and sufficient. Should there be any changes to the employee's circumstances/health or their workplace, the risk assessment should be reviewed.

4. Possible actions and additional control measures

Amendments to the current role – where possible, duties should be amended to reduce the risk to the employee where this is considered medium/high. Although it is recognised that redeployment opportunities outside of the classroom may be limited in schools, some possible options to explore include:

- relocating employees to a different part of a building or location where the risk is lower
- moving the employee to different duties with a lower risk of infection
- allowing the employee to complete some of their role from home where possible
- consider changing the way in which activities are undertaken for example, use of video conferencing

Amendments to the workplace – whilst arrangements advised by the government and other agencies should be effective in reducing risk, employees with vulnerabilities may understandably be worried about a return to working outside the home or have particular concerns, which head teachers should explore and address where possible. Examples of additional measures to explore include:

- Employees can be designated their own desk or workspace which only they are allowed to use
- In some circumstances screens could be provided to reduce contact with others
- The employee could be located near a window which opens to ensure good ventilation
- The employee could be relocated to a different building or area which is quieter
- Signage can be put up, with the employee's agreement, indicating that they are at higher risk to ensure other employees stringently observe social distancing measures

- Supplies of hand sanitiser and wipes can be made available near to the employee's desk in addition to being available across the school.
- The employee could be encouraged to bring their own food and drink negating the need for them to use shared kitchens e.g. bring a thermos of coffee, bring food in a chill bag so it doesn't need to be put in a shared fridge, etc.
- Vary the employee's start and finish time to ensure they can avoid bottlenecks at entrances and exits
- Consider how the employee travels to work and encourage walking, cycling or using their own car where possible. Where the employee is required to use public transport, consider whether working times can be varied to enable them to avoid busier periods. Car-sharing should be avoided if at all possible, but where it is not the passenger should sit in the back and ensure there is good ventilation. Individuals may wish to wear face coverings as is the legal requirement on public transport.
- The employee may wish to wear a face covering whilst at work

5. Non-Covid Risk Assessments

Another aspect of the covid-related changes to the school environment is that they may impact on pre-existing risk assessments. There is therefore a need to review these other risk assessments and update them as required. For example, it may have been agreed as part of an individual risk assessment that a disabled employee uses a particular entrance due to ease of access. However, the new one-way system introduced due to covid, makes this impossible, meaning the risk assessment and controls need to be revisited.

! Actions

- Identify staff who are shielding (clinically extremely vulnerable) and check they received a medical letter to confirm this. Obtain a copy for their personal file.
- Identify staff who are clinically vulnerable or have other higher risk factors.
- For all of the above who have an identified risk factor, complete an individual risk assessment in conjunction with the individual, before they return to school.
- Obtain advice from your Occupational Health, HR, Health & Safety Advisors and the local Public Health team as required.
- Revisit existing individual risk assessments to check if they need updating due covid changes.