

### COVID-19 Home Working (Short Term)

## Introduction

Due to the current situation with Coronavirus COVID-19 there is an increasing demand for employees to work from home. The following guidance provides the minimum set-up required to ensure employees can safely work from home.

## Legal Duties

An employer’s legal duty to protect and monitor the health, safety and welfare of workers extends to employees working from home. Consequently, the same health and safety requirements apply to home workers as to office-based staff. In summary the employer must do what is reasonably practicable to ensure the health and safety of their workforce whilst at work and of others who might be affected by the work activity.

## Recognised Control Measures

Before an employee begins to work from home, the employer should request that the employee carries out an initial self assessment of the proposed working area to determine the specific hazards and risks that may be posed to any home worker. Form HWVC-ST, attached, can be used to guide this initial assessment. If the situation dictates that the employee must work from home to care for dependents or due to self-isolation, temporary measures should be put into place. The employer should periodically check with the employee that the working conditions continue to meet the required standards. The working situation should be reviewed periodically to ensure the conditions are suitable. A structured discussion with their Manager is sufficient, provided that action is taken where issues are identified. A note of the discussion should be recorded. If home working lasts beyond two months longer term controls should be reviewed and put into place.

Employees should designate an area in their home which would be ergonomically sound for the particular worker to work from, they may be a desk/home office, dining table or ‘foldaway’ desk. They should be advised not work from locations where their position could increase the risks of work-related disorders – such as a sofa or bed where the viewing angle of a laptop would not be sufficient.

The use of a ‘display screen equipment self-assessment’ questionnaire (see Guidance Note 5-11 – Display Screen Equipment) should be completed by the employee as this may be helpful in ensuring the workstation is right for them and will present no physical hazards. Due to the current situation long-term measures may not be immediately available and therefore the working conditions must be reviewed if prolonged.

The employee should ensure their working areas are free from hazards that could be a foreseeable cause of slips and trips, for example trailing power supply and computer cables that could cause someone to trip should be fitted with a cable cover or taped down.

As a short-term measure laptops are favoured in home working situations due to their size and convenience, but they can present hazards beyond those associated with desktop computers. It is not advisable to work all day on a laptop as the size of the keyboard and the size and position of the screen are more restricted than those associated with desktop computers. Employers should advise employees to take regular breaks and ensure they maintain the correct posture.

The electrical components in a home worker’s house are not subject to the same testing requirements as an office building. This can be easily be dealt with during the self assessment by ensuring that plugs are correctly wired, that cables are covered and undamaged, and by providing circuit breakers for connecting work equipment to the domestic power supply. Work equipment should be shut down and switched off at the end of the working day. The home worker should be instructed to carry out basic visual checks on their electrical equipment to ensure it remains in good condition.

The company’s accident and dangerous occurrences reporting procedure should be explained to home workers, and they should report to their Managers any accident that occurs during their working time.

Home workers should be provided with communication devices, i.e. telephones or e-mail facilities to ensure that in the event of emergency, home workers can call for help. Supervisors should be able to contact the employee at all times during working hours.

Home workers should have regular meetings with Managers and colleagues, via individual or conference calls, so that they can interface with the rest of their team, share problems, issues and concerns about their work, and keep abreast of developments in the business.

Employers need also to ensure that their Employer’s Liability Insurance will cover home workers and give the home worker sight of the policy certificate. They must also provide statutory health and safety information to the worker. This may be an electronic copy of your employee safety handbook.

With these measures in place, an employee’s health and safety during home working can be effectively monitored and the employer can be assured that the employee has adequate safety systems in their place of work.

Remember to keep records of home working assessments and the actions you take to monitor the working conditions of your home working employees. Keep these with Safety Records or in personnel files.

Should the situation change or become longer term it may be necessary to modify the advice to recognise the extenuating circumstances.