



DAVID BARBER
OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH



COVID-19: OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR BUSINESSES

FREE EBOOK

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INTRODUCTION

Since the start of the Coronavirus pandemic back in March 2020, businesses and their employees have gone through unimaginable turmoil. Across the UK, businesses have had to temporarily close their doors, with a shift to working from home practices and some industries having to close altogether. As of January 2021, there have been over **3 million cases** of COVID-19 in the United Kingdom, highlighting the real severity of the situation.

But what about the impact on businesses? Across all industries, **48%** have experienced a decrease in turnover compared to what would normally be expected. Not to mention the rising levels of unemployment and business closures.

Occupational Health providers are here to deliver services designed to help you work through the pandemic safely. Our job is to ensure you are operating in line with new legislation, whilst also helping you to support your employees' mental wellbeing. With the help of the right Occupational Health partner, you can ensure you are in the strongest position possible to navigate through lockdowns and to succeed with your workforce post-pandemic.

This guide is designed to educate you on the Occupational Health services out there which will help you to get through the Coronavirus pandemic.



FACE FIT TESTING



Something the large majority of the population have become accustomed to over the course of the past year, is wearing a mask. However, masks aren't just something people need to think about when going to the supermarket, they're now a consideration for many more business environments too.

Previously, respiratory protective equipment (RPE) was predominantly used to protect employees from exposure to harmful chemicals, fumes and dust. However, since the onset of the pandemic, RPE is much more commonplace across a wider range of industries and workplaces to protect employees from contracting and transmitting the COVID-19 virus through **human contact**. For example, within the dental industry; dentists and dental nurses are now required to wear RPE/PPE in order to safely operate.

Face fit testing is recognised by the Health & Surveillance Executive (HSE) as the only means of ensuring that employees have adequate protection through the use of properly-fitted respiratory protective equipment (RPE). Simply having the equipment isn't enough – it needs to be fit for purpose with HSE face fit testing to ensure complete protection for your workforce. Face fit testing is actually a **legal requirement** in order to fully protect employees.



Below is a list of the masks that require face fit testing:

- **Powered respirators**
- **Full face masks**
- **Escape set masks**
- **Full breathing apparatus masks**
- **Filtering face pieces (disposable masks)**
- **Half masks**

COUNTERFEIT RPE

A concern which has been prominent throughout the course of the pandemic is counterfeit RPE available online.

Disreputable sellers are listing RPE which is not fit for purpose, leaving your employees and those they come into contact with dangerously unprotected. Don't be tempted to go to a cheaper, unknown supplier. Instead, ensure you use **reputable sellers** and ensure RPE has a **CE mark**; indicating the product complies with strict health, safety, and environmental protection standards.

CARRYING OUT FACE FIT TESTING

Carrying out face fit testing usually involves an assessment of the **make, model, type and size** of face piece is suitable for their use. During this time, we are doing everything possible to minimise the transmission of COVID-19 during our [Face Fit Testing service](#). We can make the appropriate observations from a distance and deliver any instructions verbally to avoid unnecessary human contact. Ensure your employees are equipped with adequate personal protection, and that your business avoids litigation.

FACE FIT TESTING RESOURCES

Face Fit Testing Masks For Coronavirus Blog

<https://www.dbochealth.com/blog/fit-testing-face-masks-for-coronavirus/>

Face Fit Testing Service

<https://www.dbochealth.com/service/face-fit-testing/>

DISPLAY SCREEN EQUIPMENT (DSE)

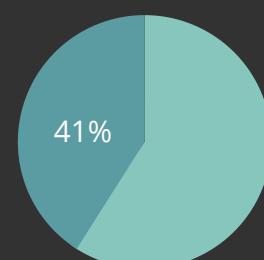
WORKING WITH DSE AT HOME

In April 2020, statistics released by the UK's [Office for National Statistics](#) showed **49.2%** of adults in employment were working from home. Working from home presents a whole host of new challenges when it comes to ergonomics, MSKs and using DSE safely.

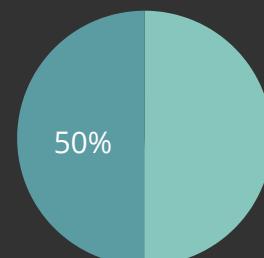
One of your responsibilities as an employer is to protect your employees from workplace risks; including using **Display Screen Equipment (DSE)** whilst working from home.

HOMEO WORKER DSE STATISTICS

A recent study conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic showed that:



41% of homeworkers complained of lower back pain



50% of homeworkers complained of worsened neck pain

Source:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7503869/>

Recommended ergonomic practices include:

- Sit with your feet flat on the floor
- Use a suitable chair with lumbar support (or use a lumbar cushion)
- Your back should maintain contact with the chair back
- Keep your spine upright and straight, and your head in line with your spine
- Have your computer / laptop positioned straight in front of you
- Your chair height should be positioned so you can use the keyboard with your wrists and forearms straight and level with the floor.
- Your elbows should land at the same height as the table
- Your screen should be eye level
- Keep your mouse close and keyboard straight in front of you

Working from home does present difficulties when it comes to acting in line with best practice. However, there is a lot you can do to support your employees. For example, allowing them to borrow office furniture & equipment and encouraging regular breaks from the screen.



DSE RESOURCES

Display Screen Equipment (DSE) Workstation Checklist put together by the [HSE](#)

Working Safely with Display Screen Equipment at Home Blog

<https://www.dbocchealth.com/blog/display-screen-equipment/>

Musculoskeletal Pain after Poor Home Working Practices Blog

<https://www.dbocchealth.com/blog/musculoskeletal-pain-after-poor-home-working-practices/>

Ergonomics and DSE Service

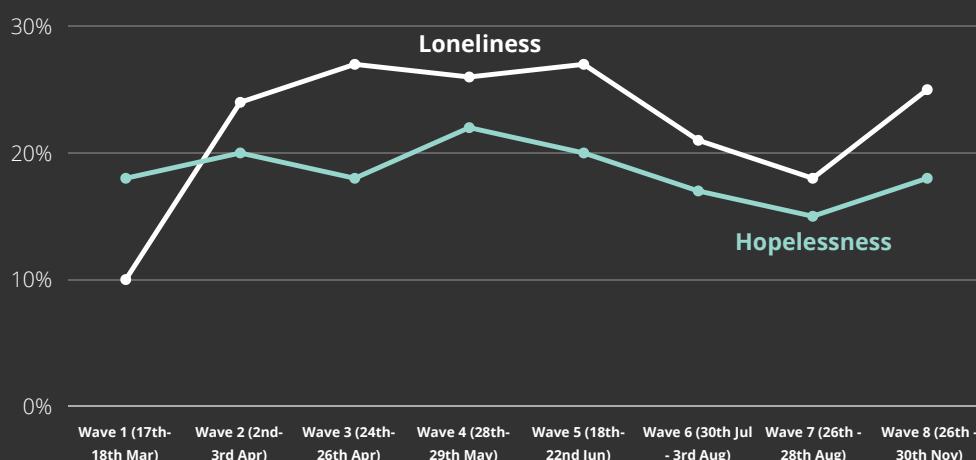
<https://www.dbocchealth.com/service/ergonomics-and-dse/>



EMPLOYEE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

One of the largest impacts of the pandemic is the downfall of people's mental health and wellbeing. From the lack of social interaction, inability to see friends and family, health anxiety to financial worries. Unfortunately, the list of things to feel down about is extensive. Naturally, this mental stress takes a toll on an employee's workplace performance. This is particularly the case for employees working from home, where it can be difficult to establish a work-life balance.

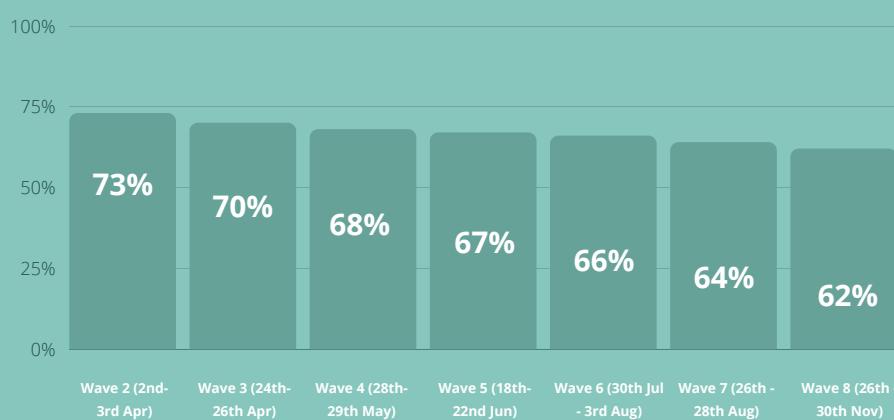
UK FEELINGS OF LONELINESS AND HOPELESSNESS



Since March 2020, the extent of loneliness has risen, from 10% of UK adults surveyed to 25% in November 2020.

Source: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/news/nine-month-study-reveals-pandemics-worsening-emotional-impacts-uk-adults>

LEVELS OF VERY OR FAIRLY WELL WITH STRESS RELATED TO THE PANDEMIC



The proportion who say they are "coping well with the stress of the pandemic" has fallen steadily, from almost three quarters (73%) in April 2020 to 62% in November 2020.

Source: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/news/nine-month-study-reveals-pandemics-worsening-emotional-impacts-uk-adults>

When your employees are under high levels of emotional stress, it's really important to make their mental health and wellbeing a key consideration when making business decisions. It's important to speak to your employees about their experiences during this time and how they have been affected; some individuals may need extra support.

Other employees may be suffering in silence with a number of issues – by speaking to your team and getting to know what they're going through, you will be able to identify these issues and support them in the most appropriate way. Of course, you don't need to do this all yourself if you don't feel prepared to do so. We have a specialised health and wellbeing programme that measures, monitors and puts the steps in place to help and improve employee's mental and physical health during this time.

STAFF MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING RESOURCES

Supporting Staff With The Knock-On Effect of Coronavirus Blog

<https://www.dbocchealth.com/blog/supporting-staff-with-the-knock-on-effect-of-coronavirus/>

Employee Wellbeing Blog

<https://www.dbocchealth.com/blog/preparing-for-a-second-wave-covid/>

Building Workplace Resilience and Productivity After Coronavirus Blog

<https://www.dbocchealth.com/blog/building-workplace-resilience-and-productivity-after-coronavirus/>

Health and Wellbeing Program Service

<https://www.dbocchealth.com/service/health-wellbeing-program/>

RISK ASSESSMENTS

RETURN TO WORK RISK ASSESSMENTS

During the third national lockdown, the advice from the government is to work from home wherever possible. However, we anticipate that during the warmer months, as we saw in summer 2020, more employees will begin returning to the workplace. Businesses should complete a COVID-19 risk assessment as part of Government regulations in returning to business as usual.

The appropriate action that businesses need to take in order to prepare the workplace for returning employees needs to be dealt with on an individually assessed basis; hence the importance of completing a return to work risk assessment.



"THE VIRUS IS THE HAZARD"

Within the risk assessment, the virus is considered a hazard, and steps will need to be put in place to control this hazard where possible.

Factors businesses need to consider include:

- Number of employees
- Contact between employees
- Contact with the public
- How employees travel to work e.g does public transport put the employee at unnecessary and greater risk?
- Social distancing measures
- Workplace cleaning
- Providing employees with PPE

The guidelines and risk exposure also differ between industries; for example, healthcare professionals cannot follow the same guidelines due to the nature of their role. Luckily, an OH provider, such as ourselves, can help you out with this process. We ensure you are keeping your employees safe as well as your company; acting in line with legalities at every step of the process.

RETURN TO WORK RISK ASSESSMENT RESOURCES

Free Return To Work Risk Assessment Download
<https://www.dbocchealth.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/RTW-Questionnaire-following-C-19.docx>

OTHER FACTORS TO CONSIDER AS AN EMPLOYER

SOCIAL SHEILDING

Individuals who have been asked to social shield have been done so on the basis that they are extremely vulnerable, or are at risk of severe illness from COVID-19. You can find a full list of what conditions may qualify a person to be defined as vulnerable over on the [GOV.UK website](#). During the first lockdown in March 2020, at-risk individuals were asked to shield. This advice was later lifted, however as of the third national lockdown, these individuals have been asked to shield again. Many are still yet to receive their vaccination.

Where does this leave you as an employer? Where possible, employees who are shielding should carry out their job from home. As an employer, we advise that you keep in regular contact and provide as much support as possible. It's likely that shielding employees are under a lot of emotional stress during this time.



For those who cannot work from home, they should not attend work. Could you allow individuals that fall under this category to take on an alternative role temporarily, enabling them to work from home? If this isn't possible, you should have a discussion about putting these individuals on furlough.

Further consideration should be for your employees who live with a vulnerable individual, or feel vulnerable themselves, but have not received a shielding letter. Whilst the advice for these individuals is not to social shield, they will feel greater levels of stress and/or anxiety if they cannot work from home. We would advise that as their employer, you should provide additional support for individuals in this situation. However, this is at your discretion.

PREGNANCY

Currently, women who are pregnant have been placed in the 'moderate-risk' group. For any of your employees who are pregnant, additional support and precautions should be put in place; it's important to remember that these individuals are likely to be feeling anxious about the situation. What do you need to consider as an employer to keep pregnant employees safe?

Women less than 28 weeks pregnant and not within an at-risk group:

- You should carry out a pregnancy risk assessment, particularly if this individual is in the workplace and not working from home.
- As part of this process, you should identify any risks, and put procedures in place to help manage these risks. If the risks cannot be suitably controlled, you must offer the employee suitable alternative work or working arrangements (including working from home), suspend them on normal pay, or place them on furlough.



Women more than 28 weeks pregnant or those within an at-risk group:

- If pregnant employees that fall under this category are in the workplace, it's important to enforce strict compliance with social distancing to minimise the risk of contracting the virus.
- However, wherever possible, allow these individuals to work from home. Again, where this is not possible, it is advised to suspend them on normal pay or place them on furlough.

If you require help with a COVID-19 specific pregnancy risk assessment, an Occupational Health team can provide you with additional support here.

PREGNANCY RESOURCES

Free Pregnancy Risk Assessment Download
<https://www.dbocchealth.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Pregnancy-Risk-Assessment.docx>

BLACK, ASIAN OR MINORITY ETHNIC BACKGROUNDS (BAME)

Data from [Public Health England](#) suggests that Black, Asian or other minority ethnic (BAME) groups are at greater risk of contracting COVID-19. Health conditions that put individuals at greater risk of experiencing severe coronavirus symptoms are also more common in BAME groups. This means that as an employer you should ensure that the risk assessment you carry out addresses the physical and mental health of BAME staff, rather than collectively grouping all employees together. If you would like further information on this, speak to our Occupational Health team.

IMPLICATIONS OF FURLOUGH

As of December 13, 2020, approximately **9.9 million** jobs, from **1.2 million** different [employers](#) were furloughed in the UK. Putting employees on furlough is a decision many businesses across the UK have had to make; whether their industry has been forced to close, or as a result of a decline in demand.

What can you do to reassure employees? Just as you would with employees working from home, you should check in on furloughed employees to make sure they are doing well both mentally and physically, as well as keep them informed on any company news. Encourage them to bring up any concerns they have; communication is so important at this time.

As an employer, have you considered the impact being furloughed has on your employees' wellbeing?

- Employees may experience lower self-esteem and feelings of inadequacy compared to those who are still kept working
- Feeling disconnected from the team
- Worried about not being brought back to work, and being made redundant permanently
- Financial worries due to a reduced income
- Feelings of isolation and loneliness



CONCERNS ABOUT COVID-19 VACCINATION

For many, the coronavirus vaccine represents the light at the end of this very dark tunnel. That being said, the vaccination doesn't come without its doubts for some.

The vaccination is currently (as of February 2021) being rolled according to the following priority list:

PRIORITY | RISK GROUP

- | | |
|----|--|
| 1 | RESIDENTS IN A CARE HOME FOR OLDER ADULTS AND STAFF WORKING IN CARE HOMES FOR OLDER ADULTS |
| 2 | ALL THOSE 80 YEARS OF AGE AND OVER AND FRONTLINE HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE WORKERS |
| 3 | ALL THOSE 75 YEARS OF AGE AND OVER |
| 4 | ALL THOSE 70 YEARS OF AGE AND OVER AND CLINICALLY EXTREMELY VULNERABLE INDIVIDUALS (NOT INCLUDING PREGNANT WOMEN AND THOSE UNDER 16 YEARS OF AGE) |
| 5 | ALL THOSE 65 YEARS OF AGE AND OVER |
| 6 | ADULTS AGED 16 TO 65 YEARS IN AN AT-RISK GROUP (SEE BELOW) |
| 7 | ALL THOSE 60 YEARS OF AGE AND OVER |
| 8 | ALL THOSE 55 YEARS OF AGE AND OVER |
| 9 | ALL THOSE 50 YEARS OF AGE AND OVER |
| 10 | REST OF THE POPULATION (TO BE DETERMINED) |

For staff working within a healthcare setting, they may be receiving the vaccine faster than initially thought. These individuals might be hesitant of any side effects, and the reports that the approval process has been rushed.

It's important to reassure concerned employees on the strict standards vaccines have to adhere to in order to be approved for use in the UK.

You can also refer them to the following links for further information and guidance:

- [GOV.UK: Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine for COVID-19 approved by MHRA](#)
- [GOV.UK: Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine for COVID-19 approved by MHRA](#)
- [GOV.UK: Moderna vaccine for COVID-19 approved by MHRA](#)

HOW DAVID BARBER OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH CAN HELP YOUR BUSINESS NAVIGATE COVID-19



We are passionate about supporting businesses, keeping employees safe, and where possible getting their employees back to work in a safe, efficient and productive way.

Services we provide which will help your business at this time:

- Face Fit Testing
- Health Surveillance
- Management Referrals
- Health and Wellbeing Programmes
- Drug and Alcohol Testing
- Sickness Management
- Ergonomics and DSE services
- Fit For Work Medicals

All of our services are carried out in accordance with HSE guidelines, in order to keep our clients, and our team safe.

We also offer a range of free Occupational Health resources on our website for you to download and use; from return to work assessments to pregnancy risk assessments.

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SOURCES

<https://github.com/CSSEGISandData/COVID-19>

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/business/businessservices/bulletins/coronavirusandtheeconomicimpactsontheuk/22october2020>

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/bulletins/coronavirusintheukconomyandsocietyfasterindicators/23april2020>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7503869/>

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/ck1.htm>

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/news/nine-month-study-reveals-pandemic-worsening-emotional-impacts-uk-adults>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>

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