



Covid-19 Management Toolkit:

Staff Shielding Returning to Workplace Guidance

The coronavirus outbreak has caused large and sudden changes to the way we work at EEAST. Management and Staff have been forced to adapt quickly to new ways of working over the past year plus.

As lockdown measures begin to ease and with the national shielding lifted on the 1st April 2021, staff will be looking to their line manager to provide guidance during these uncertain times.

The 'Staff Shielding Returning To Work' toolkit will be a useful resource in helping ease the transition and make sure staff coming back to work are reassured that their safety and wellbeing are a priority. At the heart of the Return-to-Work plan should be a commitment to support flexible and remote working (where possible) and support for physical and mental health for workers who cannot work from home or who may be concerned about being in the workplace or travelling to base.

When planning a return to the workplace (where homeworking is not possible), the guiding principle should be how to safeguard the health and wellbeing of people. Where working from home is not possible it is key for managers to ensure they can [meet three key tests](#) before bringing shielding staff back to the workplace:

- **Is it essential?**
Line Managers should engage with their people to understand if returning to the workplace is essential for productivity or wellbeing. If a return is essential, the employer should give clear guidance. Where possible, in keeping with the latest government advice, the employer should continue to support working from home - in the short term while significant health risks and legitimate concerns for safety remain - and in the longer term as part of more flexible ways of working for the future.
- **Is it sufficiently safe?**
Management has a duty of care to identify and manage risks to ensure



that the workplace is sufficiently safe to return to. This could include reconfiguring workspaces and common areas to allow appropriate social distancing, possible changes to working hours, and increased workplace cleaning and sanitation measures.

- **Is it mutually agreed?**

Research found that four in ten people are anxious about returning to work. It's vital that there is a clear dialogue between management and employees so concerns can be raised and individual needs and worries taken into account. To manage some of these issues, there will need to be flexibility on both sides to accommodate different working times or schedules.

As well as following the [latest government guidance](#) and legal obligations regarding health and safety, using our Returning to the Workplace Planner, managers can assess their readiness to meet these three key tests.

Risk assessments and health and safety measures

For shielding staff returning to the workplace, managers must consider detailed risk management approaches to safeguard employees' health and minimise the risk of infection, basing plans on [up-to-date government and public health guidance](#).

SOM, in collaboration with the CIPD, Mind, ACAS and BITC have produced a [toolkit](#) to help employers plan a return to the workplace in a way that manages risk alongside their legal obligations.

It's crucial to work in close collaboration with your Health and Safety, IPC, Workforce Directorate and Kays Medical Occupational Health teams wherever necessary for additional support.

Regularly communicate to staff the practical measures you are taking to help reassure them that their health, wellbeing and safety is your top priority. Make sure they are clear about the rules and procedures they should follow both in the workplace and at home, especially if they begin to feel unwell.



You will need to review your workplace area and consider the following for staff returning from shielding:

- Can they maintain safe distance between each other?
- How will you manage meetings and other interactions?
- Encourage LFT - It's also likely that more large-scale testing for COVID-19 infection will form a key part of facilitating a safe return to the workplace for larger numbers of employees. This could form an extension of the current framework for the [testing of essential workers](#) and members of their household, and will mean every employer implementing a systematic approach for their workforce.
- How you can plan breaks and lunchtimes to minimise number of staff in communal areas such as kitchens.
- How to implement resourcing strategies to support physical distancing such as 'cohorting' (ie keeping teams of workers working together and as small as possible), or staggering working hours to limit numbers in the workplace at the same time.
- How to maintain protection and hygiene measures to minimise the spread of infection, remind staff about regular and effective handwashing, and provide hand sanitiser.
- If your department have been closed for a period of time, you should consider carrying out a deep-clean with the support of Estates and Facilities team before reopening.

You should therefore review your cleaning arrangements, for example ensuring all phones/keyboards etc. are wiped daily with anti-viral cleaner. You can refer to the [government guidance](#) for more information.

- Depending on your working environment, you may need to consider providing additional PPE, including gloves, masks or anti-viral hand gel. Remember that face coverings are now mandatory for shop workers, bar staff and waiters; more information is available on the [government website](#). If you want people to wear gloves or masks, then you will also need to think about training and briefing staff on their correct usage – since both can be ineffective if used inappropriately.

Good ventilation can help reduce the risk of spreading coronavirus, so focus on improving general ventilation, preferably through fresh air or mechanical systems. The risk of air conditioning spreading coronavirus (COVID-19) in the



workplace is extremely low as long as there is an adequate supply of fresh air and ventilation. Advice on the use of air conditioning systems can be found on the [HSE website](#).

Shielding Staff Returning – Individual Key Check List and Support:

- ✓ Request staff to **undertake the RTW Risk Assessment**: [Click Here](#)
- ✓ Check if they had both doses of their vaccinations - if not assist as appropriate.
- ✓ Plan a re-orientation or re-induction process for returning staff.
- ✓ Ensure they are fully compliant with their Statutory and Mandatory Training.
- ✓ Arrange a one-to-one return meeting with every employee returning from shielding, where key focus is on health, safety and well-being.
- ✓ Managers need to have a sensitive and open discussion with every individual and discuss any adjustments and/or ongoing support to facilitate an effective return to the workplace.
- ✓ Managers should not attempt to unilaterally change previous terms and conditions, some staff may require a phased return to their full roles or responsibilities or want to discuss a new working arrangement (Flexible working policy/Home working policy where applicable), especially if their domestic situation has changed because of the pandemic.
- ✓ Make an Occupational Health Referral where necessary.
- ✓ Ensure adequate controls in place to protect staff when they return to work.
- ✓ Inform/monitor any specific control the staff member returning from shielding may require.
- ✓ PPE/Fit Testing - has the member of staff passed fit testing? If they failed fit testing, check if they have been provided with an alternative (such as a powered hood) and ensure staff have been provided practical training on the use of the hood.
- ✓ Ensure returning staff are aware of new Covid19 guidance/processes
[Evolve Link Click here](#)



Changes to the current lockdown restrictions have affected the STP regions differently.

The changes are also likely to continue to fluctuate, with stricter measures being imposed, with very little notice. There is now guidance on suggested steps, principles and measures to be taken in workplaces (where the preferred option is working from home if possible) and every team leader will need to consider future workforce planning.

Good level of staff engagement and two-way communication with the staff returning from shielding is key. Keeping the employees informed of the challenges/progress of the services will help them to make their own decisions and give them some degree of security in very uncertain times. Knowing they are valued and receiving support from their line managers to help prioritise their health and safety will be pivotal to their wellbeing.

The Trust is not working to a defined timeframe for re-integration of the staff currently shielding. Line managers should work with individuals to identify the best solution to meet individual circumstances, in conjunction with needs of the services.

A guide such as this cannot possibly cover every business situation that will arise at EEAST, However, this toolkit will help you to think about the types of issues or challenges that may arise in your work area, as restrictions begin to be relaxed. Do click on the following link to keep up to date with the [latest government advice](#).