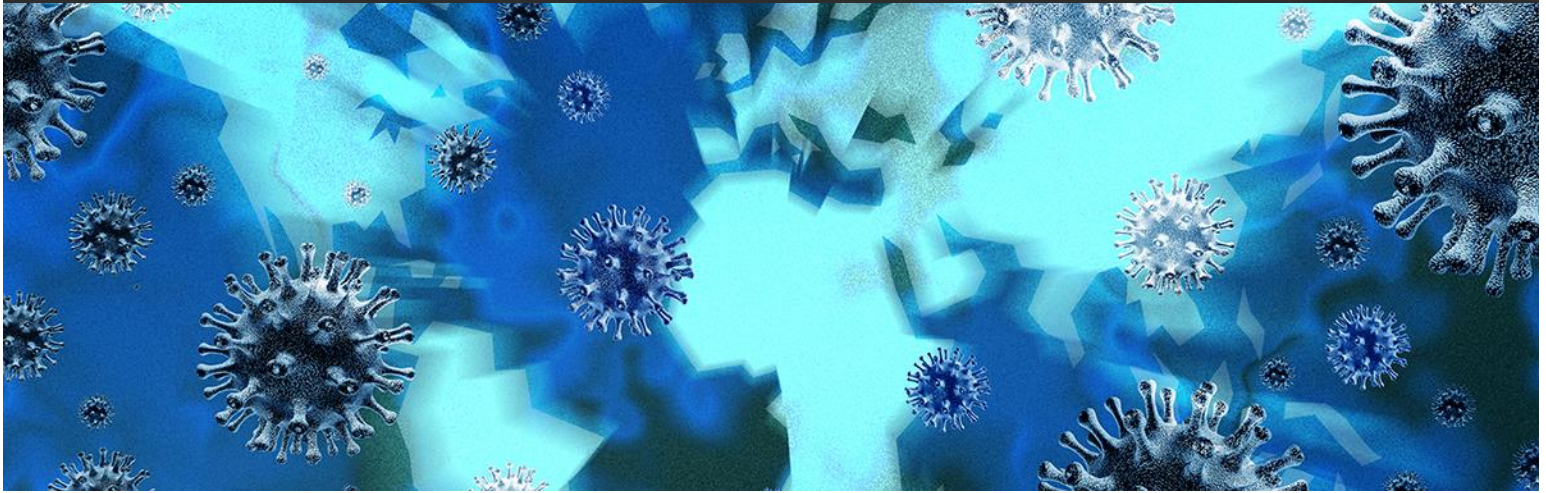


Alert | Health Emergency Preparedness Task Force: Coronavirus Disease 2019



March 2020

Health and Safety Executive for England and Wales Launches Coronavirus Health and Safety Advice Portal

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE), the workplace safety regulator and primary enforcement authority for England and Wales, has launched a dedicated [online portal for its coronavirus-related health and safety recommendations](#).

As was detailed in a [previous GT Alert](#), the nature of the coronavirus outbreak is such that it transcends normal health and safety matters. For that reason, the UK's [Department of Health & Social Care](#) and [Public Health England](#) are leading the UK government response. However, as we also noted in that GT Alert, normal health and safety law continues to play a role as the HSE's portal indicates.

One area of the portal relates to the duties employers have towards individuals working from home (WFH). WFH has become widespread in response to government recommendations, the independent actions of employers, and unwillingness on the part of employees themselves to commute and risk entering into contact with other people who may be infected with the coronavirus. It can, however, often be overlooked that health and safety law applies to the employer/employee relationship in its broad sense and not just to that relationship as it is conducted in a specific workplace location.

To that end, the HSE portal notes that employers “*have the same health and safety responsibilities for home workers as for any other workers*” and that employers should, including in relation to WFH as a result of the coronavirus, consider the following questions:

- How will you keep in touch with employees?
- What work activity will employees be doing (and for how long)?
- Can the work be undertaken safely?
- Does the employer need to put control measures in place to protect its employees?

With the above in mind, the HSE sets out a range of recommendations for employers including:

1. keeping in touch with WFH employees and ensuring regular contact to make sure they are healthy and safe (with the HSE noting that if contact is poor, “*workers may feel disconnected, isolated or abandoned*” with resulting stress and mental health impacts);
2. that risks associated with using display screen equipment (DSE) should be controlled. This includes conducting home workstation assessments (although, and this is relevant to short-term WFH arrangements put in place in response to the coronavirus, the HSE notes that “*there is no increased risk from DSE work for those working at home temporarily*” with the result that “*in that situation employers do not need to do home workstation assessments*”);
3. in relation to specialised display screen equipment, the HSE states that “*employers should try to meet those needs where possible,*” although this duty can be satisfied by allowing workers to take their normal equipment home (to the extent that the equipment is portable enough for them to do so);
4. for larger items, such as ergonomic chairs, height-adjustable desks *et cetera*, employers should encourage workers to try other ways of creating a comfortable working environment (such as by using supporting cushions);
5. to mitigate work-related stress and potential harm to employees’ mental health, employers should put procedures in place to keep in direct contact with WFH employees so that they can recognise signs of stress as early as possible; and
6. employers should have an emergency point of contact, so their employees know how to get help if they need it.

Employers are advised to, as always, maintain a watching brief on recommendations from the HSE in relation to the impacts from the coronavirus. This is in addition to the more general, medically-focused advice issued by the Department of Health & Social Care and Public Health England which, to the extent it applies to employers, should also be followed.

For more information and updates on the developing COVID-19 situation, visit [GT’s Health Emergency Preparedness Task Force: Coronavirus Disease 2019](#).

This GT Alert is limited to non-U.S. matters and law.

Author

This GT Alert was prepared by:

- **Aonghus Heatley** | +1 (44) (o) 203. 349.8759 | aheatley@gtlaw.com

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