



Coronavirus Risk Assessment Guidance

What to look out for in
your school/college
risk assessment



Coronavirus crisis
Workplace checklist



This National Education Union (NEU) guidance is for use in conjunction with our [joint union checklist on safe full opening for schools](#).

The guidance:

- sets out what legal requirements are in place for conducting risk assessments, what risk assessment involves and what a risk assessment should 'look like'; and
- identifies key hazards (defined as things which have the potential to cause harm) which need to be addressed when Covid-19 risk assessments are carried out. For support with the health and safety measures which need to be in place for safe full opening see the [joint union checklist](#).

The guidance aims to support:

- NEU leader members with their role in conducting (with employer support) and implementing their employer's risk assessment, as part of their responsibility for day-to-day management of health and safety; and
- NEU members and reps/health and safety reps who wish to assure themselves, through the consultation process, that their school's risk assessment meets legal requirements.

By working together, the safest possible outcome can be achieved.

How can this risk assessment checklist be used by NEU leader members?

You can use it to help ensure that any advice and templates for risk assessment provided by the employer, and any you undertake in your management role, cover all the necessary areas. Working through this guidance with union reps and staff will help ensure that your risk assessment is fit for purpose, as well as providing reassurance to your staff that health, safety and wellbeing is the top priority at this time.

How can the risk assessment checklist be used by NEU members and reps/health and safety reps?

It is important to maintain the necessary distinction between the role of the employer and that of the union. It remains your employer's responsibility to ensure that risk assessments are undertaken and to support leaders and managers in doing so. As a union rep or health and safety rep, it is not your role to undertake a risk assessment for your school or college, nor should you be 'signing off' a risk assessment – that remains the employer's responsibility.

However, those who work in a school or college understand how it operates and good employers will wish to draw upon that knowledge and experience to produce a risk assessment that leads to the safest possible work environment. Indeed, there is a legal requirement to consult with health and safety reps when drawing up a risk assessment. Furthermore, whether you are a rep or an ordinary NEU member, your employer has a general duty to consult with staff on matters pertaining to health and safety.

It is also important to note that contributing to the risk assessment process in this way, whether as a safety rep or as a member of staff, does not mean that you could be held liable for any deficiencies that may later become apparent. The legal duty rests with the employer.

If you are a NEU safety rep, you are also urged to exercise your right to undertake an inspection of the site with management once the initial risk assessment is finalised and before extended opening begins, and regularly thereafter as circumstances change. If there is no NEU safety rep, discuss with members whether someone is

willing to take on the role. Hundreds of new NEU safety reps have come forward during this crisis and online training is available (contact training@neu.org.uk).

Even if there is no NEU rep, it is good practice for a joint inspection of the workplace to take place before full opening commences – the joint union checklist can be used for this purpose by any member of staff.

What are the legal requirements in respect of risk assessments?

Your employer, whether a local authority, trust or governing body, has a legal duty under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 to ensure that a suitable and sufficient risk assessment is undertaken in relation to the risks of operating during the continuing Covid-19 pandemic. This is a practical not a paper exercise. It is about identifying hazards (what can go wrong) in the workplace, assessing the risk of harm arising, and taking suitable preventative measures. The bottom line is that if a risk assessment identifies an activity/process as being too much of a risk, that activity should not happen, even if control measures are put in place. It is important to focus on the worst case scenario. It is also important for leaders to check whether the Covid-19 situation has any implications for insurance arrangements.

Risk assessments must be tailored to each individual workplace – there is no such thing as a 'one-size-fits-all' risk assessment, so simply adopting a model is not an option. **Risk assessment is a dynamic process and needs to be kept under regular review, for example when circumstances change and additional hazards become apparent. All risk assessments for full September opening will need to be revised in late August when the situation may be very different from late July.**

In its [guidance for September opening](#) the DfE clearly sets out that 'School employers should have active arrangements in place to monitor that the controls are:

- effective
- working as planned
- updated appropriately considering any issues identified and changes in public health advice'.

Health and safety legislation requires employers to protect the health and safety of employees but also others such as pupils, visitors, agency staff and contractors. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE), which enforces health and safety law in the UK has published [guidance](#) including a [risk assessment template](#) which may be useful here.

What should a risk assessment look like?

There is no single recommended format. Here are some points to check for.

Date, author and review

- ❑ Is it clear who has carried out the assessment, when it was carried out and in what circumstances it will be reviewed (for example when circumstances change or if it becomes apparent that there are issues which have been overlooked)?

Competent person

- ❑ Has it been undertaken by a competent person?

This is a legal requirement. A competent person is defined by the HSE as someone with the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to undertake the role. (If you are unsure that the person/people who have undertaken the risk assessment meet this requirement, ask how they meet the criteria.)

Identification of Covid-19 Hazards

- ❑ Does the risk assessment identify the things/situations/ behaviours/processes that may cause harm in terms of the spread of Covid-19?

Examples are listed below in relation to aspects such as bubble/groups size, movement around the building, travel and many more.

Risk Evaluation

- ❑ Is there an evaluation of the risk, ie the likelihood of harm arising, in order to determine the level of risk?

If a risk assessment describes the overall risk of full opening, or the risk ascribed to specific matters, as 'low' or 'moderate' without an indication of how this was arrived at, this is not acceptable and the assessor should be challenged on how they reached this conclusion.

Risk assessments should use the formula of LIKELIHOOD x SEVERITY = RISK.

Some risk assessment calculations are expressed on the basis of the likelihood of something occurring categorised as low, medium or high, with the same categorisation for the severity of the consequences. Another method of doing this is to rate the likelihood or probability of an event occurring on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being extremely unlikely and 5 being almost certain and to rate the severity, or consequences, of the event using the same scale with 1 being negligible ill health and 5 being fatality. The higher the resulting number the less acceptable the level of risk and the greater the mitigation measures required.

Risk Control

Measures must be in place to either eliminate the hazard (which is not possible in the case of Covid-19) or control/reduce the risk of harm so that the environment is as safe as it can be.

- ❑ Is it clear what these are, who will be responsible for ensuring that they are in place and when they will be reviewed?

Examples of Covid-19 hazards to be assessed and controlled in the risk assessment

This is not an exhaustive list and may not identify all the possible Covid-19 hazards in your particular school or college.

Protection for vulnerable groups of staff

The NEU expects employers to separately carry out individual risk assessments for individual staff members in high risk or vulnerable groups.

- ❑ Do these risk assessments include consideration of age, sex, ethnicity, pregnancy, health conditions and disability and how these factors combine to increase risk?
- ❑ Does the risk assessment consider clinically extremely vulnerable staff who may need to continue to work from home in September? Vulnerable and at risk workers guidance [here](#)

Site capacity/overcrowding/access to site

- ❑ Does the risk assessment address the maximum capacity of the site and the proportion of pupils that can be safely accommodated to allow for safe distancing?
- ❑ Does the maximum class size permitted specifically address matters of social distancing?
- ❑ Are there procedures for restricting entry to non-essential visitors including parents?

Staffing Levels

- ❑ Does the risk assessment identify the hazards associated with inadequate staffing and set out how safe staffing levels will be maintained, including at breaktimes and in cases of outbreaks?

The needs of students during and after full opening

- ❑ Does the risk assessment address the transition and re-integration needs of particular groups, such as students with SEND, looked after children, bereaved students or those who may be particularly anxious or worried?
- ❑ Is the risk assessment sensitive to the concerns of Black students and their parents?
- ❑ Does the risk assessment provide for staff training on new routines and safety procedures before full opening and updates thereafter?

Bubbles/Groups and risk of transmission

- ❑ Has the assessment sought to minimise the extent of mixing and contact between individuals through minimising group sizes and movement between groups as far as possible?
- ❑ Has the assessment also sought to achieve this through social distancing within groups as far as possible?
- ❑ Has the assessment sought to ensure that hygiene arrangements will not be compromised by either the size of bubbles/groups or by pupils and staff moving between bubbles/groups? The bigger the bubble, the tighter the protocol needs to be for isolating people when there is a case.

Induction of new staff

- ❑ Does the risk assessment cover induction on safety procedures for new staff including supply staff?

Suspected cases during the working day

- ❑ Does the risk assessment set out procedures for dealing with suspected cases, including isolating cases, informing parents and ensuring safe collection of students and appropriate cleaning, and measures to ensure all staff understand what to do if this happens?

Travel to and from the site

This has the potential to be a key hazard.

- ❑ Does the risk assessment consider safe travel for staff and pupils, covering matters such as car sharing and use of public and dedicated school transport?
- ❑ Does it consider the risk to anyone who may not have access to safe travel and set out alternatives?

Arrival and departure

- ❑ Are routines in place for arrival and departure times, including measures such as staggered start and finish times or limits on numbers of parents/carers present?

Temperature checks

- ❑ Does the risk assessment set out how any planned temperature checks on arrival will be managed safely?

Movement around the site

- ❑ Are measures in place to ensure safe movement around the building (for example, one-way systems and floor markings on staircases and in corridors) and to avoid overcrowding between lessons and during breaks/at lunchtime?
- ❑ Does the risk assessment cover the safe use of, and access to, lifts, toilets and other shared spaces?

Hygiene and cleaning

- ❑ Does the assessment fully cover hygiene and cleaning measures, including measures which will be in place for daily overnight cleaning and for cleaning during the day?
- ❑ Does it address cleaning during the day for frequently touched surfaces, frequently used equipment and areas which are most in use?

Hazards associated with use of books and other student resources

- ❑ Does the risk assessment set out safety measures on matters such as using and sanitising books and shared resources, marking books etc?

PPE

- ❑ Do risk control measures include provision of PPE to staff at greater risk of airborne contamination due to their involvement with particular pupils?
- ❑ Does it consider adequate and appropriate PPE for cleaning staff, for visitors working closely with pupils and for emergency situations?
- ❑ Does it consider whether members of staff or pupils can wear a face covering if they wish to do so?

First aid hazards

- ❑ Does the risk assessment cover first aid provision and the need for PPE for first aiders?

Catering hazards

- ❑ Does the risk assessment address arrangements to ensure that meals can be safely prepared and served?

Staff breaks

- ❑ Does the risk assessment set out how staff can safely take their breaks and eat lunch?

Office environment hazards

- ❑ Does the risk assessment set out how the administrative work of the school can safely take place?

Deliveries and waste collection

- ❑ Does the risk assessment set out how this will be safely managed in terms of times, locations and hygiene precautions for staff involved?

Sourcing of cleaning products, PPE, sanitiser, tissues

- ❑ Does the risk assessment set out arrangements to ensure a secure supply of cleaning products, PPE, sanitiser?

Emergency procedures

- ❑ Does the risk assessment set out how procedures such as fire drills will be adapted to reflect the need for social distancing?

Messaging to staff and students about new ways of working

- ❑ Does the risk assessment set out how pupils and staff will be introduced to, and reminded about, the new routines, including via signage?

Communication with parents

- ❑ Does the risk assessment address the issue of communication with parents on matters such as student safety, parental presence, and communication with school staff?
- ❑ Does it cover telling parents what to do if their child develops Covid-19 symptoms?

Communication and liaison with the Local Authority and the local Director of Public Health

- ❑ Does the risk assessment set out clear measures for school leaders and staff to communicate concerns with the local authority and the director of public health?
- ❑ Contact details for both should be obtained and the procedures written into the assessment in case of an outbreak.

Home working for staff

- ❑ Does the risk assessment consider the issue of safe home working for those who will continue to work from home?

Mental health for students and staff

- ❑ Does the risk assessment consider the mental health and wellbeing of students and the support needed to support healthy transition back to school while social distancing and other restrictions are in place?
- ❑ Does the risk assessment consider the mental health and wellbeing of staff, including by identifying staff members more at risk and by applying measures to ensure a reasonable work-life balance for all?

If you think your school risk assessment is adequate

- It is not your responsibility to sign it off, but it will be helpful for your head teacher to know that you are broadly supportive of the preventative measures set out.
- Continue to monitor its implementation and engage as regularly as necessary with school leaders.
- All staff should be encouraged to flag up issues not previously considered that are impacting upon health and safety. Risk assessment is a dynamic process.

If you think your school risk assessment is inadequate

- Seek to remedy the deficiencies through discussion with your head teacher and point out areas which are either not covered at all, or where you think the right preventative measures aren't in place. Make any practical suggestions that you see fit.
- If you can share a better example that is being used in a nearby school with similar risk factors then try this approach.

- If you remain concerned and your head teacher will still not engage in meaningful discussions, then contact your district/branch secretary who will seek to resolve the issue.
- Where the matter remains unresolved contact your regional/Wales Office.

If you think your workplace has become unsafe

- If NEU members are concerned that it may be unsafe to return to the workplace after any incident, contact your local branch or district secretary or regional/Wales office.
- The law protects you from detriment if you refuse to attend a place of work (or leave your place of work) that you have reasonable grounds to consider to be unsafe and to pose a serious and imminent danger to yourself and others.
- The NEU will fully support any member who exercises this right and defend them from any detriment.

Further guidance

[HSE guidance](#) on working safely during the coronavirus pandemic.

HSE guidance on consulting with employees and unions reps [here](#).

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