

# Returning Safely

## COVID - 19 Assessment Guidance



As isolation is eased and employees return to work, governments/ ministries would recommend organisations to complete risk assessments as part of the permission to resume normal service. This could be achieved by a separate risk assessment for COVID-19.

Therefore, there is a need to pose the questions that need to be asked so that appropriate risk assessments are suitable and sufficient may be created in all industries by utilizing common risk assessment headings.



## Understanding the assessment requirements

- Before a risk assessment is undertaken, the assessor must first ask:
  - who is doing what and how,
  - where they are doing it,
  - why they are doing it, and
  - what they are using.
- Understanding the tasks or activities is vital to assess exposure and to qualify any subsequent control decisions.

## Risk Assessment Methodology

- The risk assessment technique starts by identifying the hazards.
- For COVID -19 the virus is a biological hazard which is spread in minute droplets from sneezing, coughing, talking and breathing. Moreover, the virus can spread through surface contact from the hand to the surfaces.
- Thus the risk assessment should consider if the virus can be passed from one person to another, and whilst many can survive the infection, others may die. So the consequence of this virus should be considered as a high hazard.

## Risk Assessment Methodology

### Exposure

Consideration must be given to how exposed people are. Consider:

- While at work how might employees meet people with the disease, how frequently and for how long?
- How do employees travel to work and does this expose them to public crowds?
- Are you aware which employees have vulnerable medical conditions that make them more susceptible to the disease? How do you capture this information?
- Are you aware which employees have people in their households who may have increased exposure to the disease?
- If someone in an employee's household must isolate, what will you require your employee to do?
- Where are employees meeting people who may have the disease and does this increase exposure (e.g. in a confined space, in a well-ventilated environment or outside)?

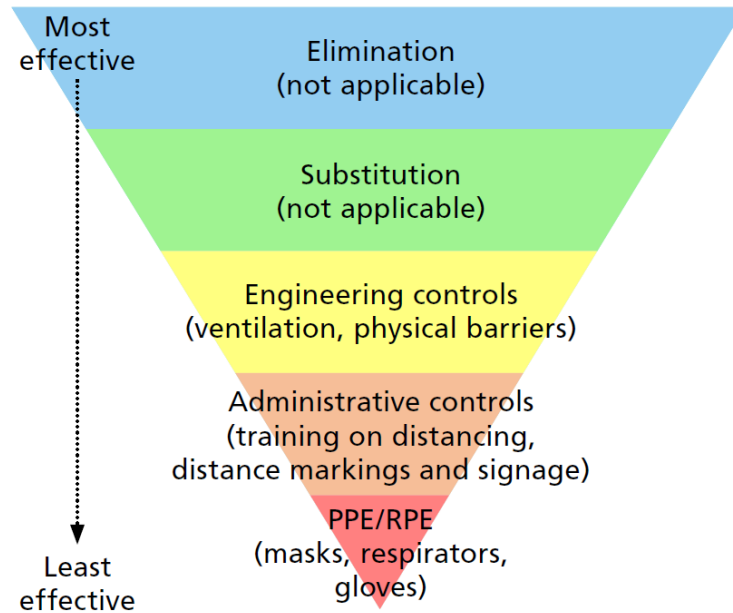
## Risk Assessment Methodology

### Control

- Any controls devised and implemented must reduce exposure of employees and anyone else who could be infected by your employees.
- Control considerations must include identification of those who may have the disease, preventative measures and what to do if you find if an employee has contracted the disease.
- Remember, controls decisions about what may be done must be realistic and reasonably practicable; achievable given the resources available.



## Risk Assessment Methodology



## Risk Assessment Methodology

### Control

- Elimination is the best form of control. Can we eliminate the virus? Only through vaccination.
- Substitution: replacing the virus for something less harmful is not possible.
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## Risk Assessment Methodology

### Control - Engineering

- Engineering controls place a physical barrier between the person and the hazard, or provide mechanical reduction of the hazard.
  - Placing screens between people will interrupt the flow of air from one person to another and therefore provide protection.
  - Providing ventilation is also an option control if it takes infected air away from people and transfers it to somewhere where the virus will not do harm.



## Risk Assessment Methodology

### Control – Administrative

- Provides the best options for most organisations.
- The risk assessment must consider how you will keep the workplace and equipment clean, and
- adjust your working practices and ensure people are safe.



## Risk Assessment Methodology

### Control -Designing a safe workplace

- Can the workplace be redesigned to maintain social distancing?
- Can meeting rooms be repurposed to spread employees out?
- Can workplace pressure be reduced to minimise the number of employees required to work in an area. (e.g. phased shift and break times, closure)?
- Are there adequate hand washing or sterilisation facilities around the workplace?
- Is there a rigid cleaning program in place for areas where most people commonly touch (e.g. equipment control panels, handles, handrails, kettles, hot desk surfaces)? Is the cleaning program effective?

## Risk Assessment Methodology

### Control - Work Equipment Environment

- Can equipment be allocated to an individual rather than shared?
  - If equipment must be shared, then how will it be cleaned between uses (e.g. phones, desks, vehicle cabs, control panels)?
- If employee falls ill with Covid-19, what deep cleaning processes will be necessary on the equipment they have been using?
- What washing/hand sterilising facilities are available to workers and how frequently should they wash their hands to reduce potential viral load and spread on equipment and in the environment?

## Risk Assessment Methodology

### Control - Safe Systems Of Work

- Can work sequencing be reorganised to avoid employees being in close contact with others? When this cannot be avoided, can the time they are in contact be minimised or can they work facing away from one another?
- Can some risks be transferred using suppliers to take over some aspects of operations or work?
- When employees and contractor must work together, are COVID -19 control standards shared and agreed ? What adjustments to contractor control may be necessary?

## Risk Assessment Methodology

### Control – PPE

- Is the last resort in the hierarchy of risk control. It is the weakest control.
- It's limited and introduces many possibilities for error:
  - being of the right specification,
  - cleanliness,
  - storage,
  - its replacement, and
  - availability.

## Risk Management

- A risk assessment does not control risk. It is the actions of individuals who apply controls that mitigate risk.
- The risk assessment must result in a risk control action plan, making it clear who will do what and by when.
- The successful implementation of the risk assessment plan must be monitored.
- Risk assessments must be routinely reviewed to check the effectiveness of the controls.



## Risk Management

- Controls must be regularly maintained and even improved as our knowledge about the virus, its transmission and its control develops.
- There should be regular management review.
- Remember, do not lose sight of the normal activity safety and health risks posed by the business operations. It remains important to maintain effective control of exposure.
- For further help and advise, contact *ARM Associates – Islam Taher at islam@arm-associates.com*





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