COVID-19: Managers’ guide to completing an individual health risk assessment

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Useful links

UK Government Working Safely During Coronavirus publications:
Section 1: Summary, purpose and background

The University of Essex has a responsibility to ensure that the health and safety and wellbeing of all staff at work is maintained. In this current pandemic the University is required to undertake a risk assessment of the workplace and to implement control measures to reduce COVID-19 related risks for transmission. COVID-19 transmission mainly arises from contact with contaminated surfaces or droplet spread.

In order to ensure that risks of COVID-19 transmission have been identified, the University has a responsibility to determine how work/activity should be carried out safely on campuses following the current guidance from the UK Government, PHE and HSE.

The way the premises will function is covered in the Premises COVID-19 Policy Guidance, and the way the University ensures the work activities are run safely are covered in the work and campuses activities paper (stage 1).

The approach we have adopted has been to combine workplace risk factors with individuals’ medical vulnerability to determine the overall risk assessment, as in figure 1 below.

Stage 1 modifies this risk according to individual needs; the individual medical vulnerability assessment is covered in the Stage 2 document.

- **Stage 1: Workplace risk of COVID-19 transmission**

- **Stage 2: Individual medical vulnerability risk to COVID-19**

- **Stage 2 Outcome: Overall OH assessment to provide individual return to work advice**
Employers have a duty of care requiring them, as far as reasonably practicable, to secure the health safety and welfare of their employees.

Managers have a duty of care to ensure that the risk of COVID-19 transmission from a work activity is reduced or eliminated for all members of staff, especially those that may be at increased risk due to their individual medical vulnerability.

The purpose of this guide (stage 2) is to provide guidance for Managers to identify staff that may be at increased risk due to their individual medical vulnerability. How to identify medically vulnerable staff and if the environment/activity is safe for them to carry out campus-based work is explained. This guidance will also assist staff in understanding the risks and how that may affect them individually.

The control measures the University will need to put in place will require changes to the way the University campuses have functioned previously, through, for example, social (physical) distancing. Commitment from the University community is required to ensure that we all contribute to reducing the risk of transmission of the COVID-19 infection.

Managers will need to:

- Identify the staff working in these roles
- Ask staff to carry out the risk assessment to determine vulnerability due to health (Stage 2)
- Ensure that the risk of COVID-19 transmission from a work activity is reduced or eliminated for all members of staff, including those members of staff who have health-related vulnerability.
- The process to achieve this is explained in Section 3 (Stage 1).
Section 2: Main work risk factors for COVID-19 Transmission

Table 1: Main Work Risk Factors for aerosol and surface COVID-19 Transmission

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work Tasks</th>
<th>Work Location</th>
<th>Work Organisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>■ Public Facing</td>
<td>■ Teaching rooms</td>
<td>■ Ability to maintain Social Distancing at work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Close contact necessary?</td>
<td>■ Accommodation</td>
<td>■ Number of different people sharing a workplace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Increased cleaning schedule</td>
<td>■ Retail/Hospitality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ High touch surfaces</td>
<td>■ Office/Information centre</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ Laboratories</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ Ability to wash hands</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ Sanitiser</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ Catch it, Kill it, Bin it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work Movement</th>
<th>Personal protective equipment (PPE) or face coverings</th>
<th>Avoidance of symptomatic people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>■ Entering and leaving work</td>
<td>■ Availability</td>
<td>■ A particular concern for a high density living and working community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Changing areas</td>
<td>■ Need PPE if required as a risk assessment control</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Toilets</td>
<td>■ How it is used</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Lunch/Breakout areas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These risk factors need to be considered for all staff returning to work on campus. The work/ campus activity paper explains how these risks of transmission can be identified and the practicable measures that can be applied. Once this has been done the workplace risk judgement should be made; it is the risk of transmission of COVID-19 through work activities that needs to be measured.

The overall workplace COVID-19 transmission risk together with the individual medical vulnerability risk will be needed to make an overall OH risk assessment and provide return to work advice to individual
workers tailored to their specific work environment/activities. Therefore, managers need to make sure that the work activities their staff will be returning to have been risk assessed and a copy (signed by the manager and member of staff) is given to the member of staff. (see Stage 1 guidance paper.)

Section 3: Individual medical vulnerability risk assessment

Many staff with underlying health conditions will need individual guidance on their vulnerability risk of severe COVID-19 infection.

The UK Government has produced guidance on shielding and groups with increased vulnerability. Many staff in the increased vulnerability groups will have had advice from their consultants and GPs. Workplace Health Safety Wellbeing will be able provide further individualised advice where necessary through the OH COVID-19 referral report.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

The manager will need to ask their member of staff how their psychological wellbeing has been during this pandemic, as they start to discuss their views on returning to on-campus work. Managers’ guidance on having conversations with staff on psychological wellbeing is available. The manager must ask their staff if they have any concerns practically (for example travel to work, childcare or care commitments) or specific to the workplace, explore their ideas on practical strategies or workplace measures that could address these concerns and their expectations on the likely adequacy of COVID-19 work-related control measures and workplace safety.

Staff who are suffering from increased concern/ anxiety or a deterioration in their mental health since the start of this pandemic and are having increased concern/anxiety on considering their need to return to the campuses can ask to be referred to OH on a COVID-19 referral to get fast track advice and support. The manager can also refer to OH if they have concerns about a member of staff’s mental wellbeing whether working from home or campus, where advice and support is required.

Clarifying the risks to staff with medical vulnerabilities

University of Essex staff could fall into four clinical vulnerable health risk groups: extremely high/very high (red); high clinical risk (amber); increased/moderate clinical risk (yellow), or standard/low clinical risk (green). Table 2 indicates the type of medical conditions that fall into these groups.
For staff in categories Amber, Yellow and Green, the manager will need to consider the workplace activities carried out by that member of staff as discussed in Section 1.

Further advice can be sought from WHSW by referring the member of staff or staff requesting an OH COVID-19 referral form.

**Table 2: Type of medical conditions in each risk category**

**Extremely High Clinical Risk/ Very High Clinical Risk (Red)**

Staff in this group are easily identified from UK Government guidelines on shielding groups and are regarded as clinically extremely vulnerable.

Staff who have relevant multiple conditions (co-morbidities) and risk factors but may not meet the UK Government Shielding Group definition may still have a very high risk for severe COVID-19 infection.

Evidence currently suggests that having a previous COVID-19 infection or being vaccinated is likely to reduce the risk of suffering from severe complications due to COVID-19.

**High Clinical Risk – Can work in a Low/Standard Risk Environment (Amber)**

Staff in this group may have an underlying medical condition, including those outlined by the UK Government as indicating increased vulnerability, or co-morbidities and risk factors (e.g. age) but do not meet the standards for the red categories above or the yellow below.

Evidence currently suggests that having a previous COVID-19 infection or being vaccinated is likely to reduce the risk of suffering from severe complications due to COVID-19.

As a University, we will be required to carry out a risk assessment of COVID-19 transmission. If home working is not an option, the member of staff can consider returning to a Standard risk environment only. Refer to COVID-19: Managers’ guide to completing a work activity risk assessment.

**Increased/Moderate Clinical Risk – Can work in a Moderate Risk Environment (Yellow)**

- Staff in this group who may have an underlying medical condition, including those outlined by the UK Government as being at increased vulnerability, but do not meet the Red or Amber clinical risk
group standards above. An example would be a stable asthmatic or a stable diabetic with no co-morbidities or complications.

- Staff suffering from e.g. (but not limited to) poor mental health undiagnosed/diagnosed Anxiety, Stress, Depression.

- Staff with concerns regarding returning to work on campuses as they live with others in their household who are shielding and/or have been diagnosed as clinically vulnerable.

Evidence currently suggests that having a previous COVID-19 infection or being vaccinated is likely to reduce the risk of suffering from severe complications due to COVID-19.

As a University we will be required to carry out a risk assessment of COVID-19 transmission risk that gives rise to no more than a Medium workplace transmission risk for any factor. Refer to COVID-19: Managers’ guide to completing a work activity risk assessment.

**Standard/Low Clinical Risk (Green)**

Staff with no health conditions or risk factors placing them in the higher risk groups above should still be practising hygiene and social distancing precautions as much as possible.

As a University we will be required to carry out a risk assessment of COVID-19 transmission risk and implement all reasonable control measures to reduce risk as far as possible. This needs to be reviewed regularly. Management of risk control measures must be maintained.
Section 4: Managerial individual health risk assessment

Managers must ask all staff who are required to return to work on campus whilst in sustained, or targeted levels to undertake a self-assessment for their vulnerability or complications from COVID-19.

Individual Health Risk Assessment - Appendix 1. Line managers should request staff to carry out a COVID-19 self-assessment to identify their individual medical vulnerability using the COVID age assessment tool. The COVID-19 self-assessment tool will only be required for members of staff who have not previously completed a COVID-19 Individual Health Risk Assessment or if staff's individual health circumstances have changed. Please do not ask the member on staff details of their medical conditions. They only need to make you aware what category they are in.

Your member of staff may need to repeat the individual health self-risk assessment and workplace risk assessment if their workplace risks or health status change or if the member of staff has informed you that their circumstances have changed.

The member of staff should inform you of the category they are in. If they are in the red category, please refer to Occupational Health, using the OH COVID-19 referral.
Any staff members who are not in a very high risk category who still have concerns about returning to campus should take advice from People & Culture or OH

Once OH have received your referral together with the initial individual health risk assessment, they will send a supplementary health questionnaire to the member of staff who will need to return it to the OH COVID-19 inbox. Once this has been received, OH will review the detailed health questionnaire and decide if a telephone/zoom consultation is required to determine the level of risk.

Following the OH consultation, OH will provide the manager with the outcome form and risk rating. If either the member of staff or manager disagrees with the outcome, they will discuss this with OH or People and Culture.

Section 5: Return to campus work (RTW) guidance

Return to campus work recommendations will be based on the level of medical vulnerability risk (Low-Moderate - High - Very High / Extremely High) and the COVID-19 workplace transmission risk.

A return to campus work recommendation would be given on the proviso that the University maintains control measures and the member of staff complies with those recommendations until such time that the community and workplace risk from COVID-19 infection is reduced. If a manager of a member of staff has any concerns regarding an individual’s ability to comply with the recommendations (due to self or others) another referral should be made to OH.

As the knowledge about COVID-19 risk develops further, the risk assessments for individual and workplace risk factors will need to be reviewed regularly. If in doubt, consult OH.

If the manager can put in place the appropriate control measures recommended, the member of staff’s ability to remain physically in the workplace will be enabled; adjustments may need to be made, such as altering work location/PPE. If the risks to the member of staff cannot be eliminated then working from home, altering work duties or staying at home may be possible outcomes. Such decisions should be taken in consultation with the Senior Employee Relations Advisors.
Appendix

1. Work activity risk grid and outcome
2. Individual Health Risk Assessment (IHRA) Process

WHSW have streamlined the COVID-19 Individual staff health risk assessment to allow for a staff self-assessment and to reduce the time required of the staff member and the manager.

Please ensure any staff returning to work on campus complete via the following link an individual online Self assessed COVID health risk assessment this assessment will identify their COVID age.

The individual Covid risk assessments are required so that you, as the manager, can understand where an individual may be at any increased risk from Covid-19, or considered Vulnerable. The Covid-age calculator is personal and requires that the individual enters their personal details in response to a series of questions.

The calculator is located in a table found as you scroll down from the page you are linked to; this page shows the background explanation of how vulnerability is assessed and is found in the box headed ALAMA Covid-age. The individual needs to complete the questions in the left-hand column of the table. Once these have been filled out fully the Blue box on the right-hand side column will display a Covid-age specific to them. This age (number) is then checked against the categories set out below based on their Covid-age.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RED</th>
<th>COVID age of 85 and over</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Highest risk from COVID-19 and considered 'extremely clinically vulnerable’. You should work from home if possible. Your manager will refer you to Occupational Health for clinical advice on whether you require any additional control measures to enable you to safely return to campus. You can return to campus work if you are unable to work from home provided it can be made reasonably safe for them to do so. This would require a low risk work activity and full risk assessment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AMBER</th>
<th>COVID age of 70-84</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High risk. Should only work in low or standard risk work activities and will need to maximise social distancing. Other controls will also be recommended such as use</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
of face coverings and these may be in addition to other standard risk mitigations such as regular hand washing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YELLOW</th>
<th>COVID age of 50-69</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moderate risk. You can work in Medium, standard or low risk work activities with sufficient adjustments and risk limitation in place. Other standard risk mitigation advice, such as regular hand washing and wearing a face covering where required/recommended must be followed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GREEN</th>
<th>COVID age of under 50</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low risk. You can work on campus social distancing. Other standard risk mitigation advice must be followed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- The staff member should then check their COVID age against the chart above and identify if they fall into the Red, Amber, Yellow or Green Category.
- The staff member should inform their manager which category they are in and the Manager will need to only refer staff members in the RED category to OH.
- When referring the staff member to Occupational Health (on the COVID referral form) you will need to include an Covid individual work activity risk assessment.
- On receipt of the referral the staff member will be sent a supplementary COVID health questionnaire from Occupational Health and an individual COVID health risk assessment will be undertaken by a clinician. If necessary, an appointment will be made.
- Staff who are not in the red category who wish to be referred to OH can request this from their manager (the line manager will need to refer them on a OH referral form).
- If, following a clinical review (taking into account vaccination status and local infection rates) additional control measures or work restrictions are required, then Occupational Health will advise the manager of this with the Staff Member’s consent.
- Please note, if your health status changes, this may have an impact on your COVID age. Please repeat this risk assessment and inform your line manager if the change to your COVID age puts you at a significant risk.
3. Occupational health service management referral form for occupational health assessment and advice for COVID-19
4. COVID-19: Quick guide for returning to work risk assessments

Step 1

The manager responsible for completing risk assessments for your department should create an updated Departmental/Section Risk assessment of COVID-19 transmission risks within your department or section and this must be shared with everyone in the department or section. A Training webinar covering this step are available for further support.

![Image of Departmental/Section Risk Assessment]

Step 2

Using the Departmental/Section Risk Assessment to identify workplace risks and control measures, every member of staff must have a Work Activity Risk Grid completed by their Line Manager.

The control measures should be documented within the Work Risk Activity Grid. If there are job roles that are the same for several members of staff, there is no reason why you cannot use the same completed grid. Guidance and a Training Webinar covering this step are available for further support.
Step 3

Once the Work Activity Risk Grid is completed by the line manager, they should then share this with the individual members of staff and ask them to carry out a COVID-19 self-assessment using the COVID age assessment tool. At this point you should discuss the work activity with the individual, explaining the process being undertaken*.

* It is recommended that line managers should have a return to campus conversation with the member of staff to discuss the following topics:

- How their psychological wellbeing has been during this pandemic
- Do they have any concerns practically for example travel to work, childcare or care commitments or specific to the workplace
- Explore their ideas on practical strategies or workplace measures that could address any concerns raised
- Their expectations on the likely adequacy of COVID-19 work-related control measures and workplace safety

Step 4

The individual then needs to complete the Individual Health Risk Assessment, indicating if they fall into the Red, Amber, Yellow or Green category only.

The individual is not required to give details to the manager of what their health issues are.

Step 5
The individual then needs to send this back to the line manager for them to decide if they need a referral to Occupational Health.

When reviewing the Health Risk Assessment and Work Activity Risk Grid these are the likely actions to be taken:

Staff in the Red category will require a referral to Occupational Health.

**Step 6**

If a referral is required for a member of staff falling in the RED category, the manager must complete a [COVID-19 referral form](#) and send this to Occupational Health, attaching both the completed Work Activity Risk Grid and Overall Outcome to Occupational Health.

They will email the member of staff a supplementary health questionnaire asking for more detailed health information. This is to be returned and remains confidential to Occupational Health.

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**Step 7**

Occupational Health will make contact with the individual to undertake an assessment if necessary and inform them of the outcome that will be sent to their line manager.

The outcome report that goes back to the manager and People and Culture only indicates which risk area the individual is in and if additional control measures are recommended.
References and further reading


Useful links

Public Health England individual guidance for COVID-19

Ethnicity and COVID-19

Cancers and COVID-19

Cardiovascular conditions and COVID-19

Dermatology and COVID-19

Endocrine conditions and COVID-19

Gastrointestinal conditions and COVID-19
Haematology conditions and COVID-19

Neurological conditions and COVID-19

Other infections and COVID-19

Pregnancy and COVID-19

Renal conditions and COVID-19

Respiratory conditions and COVID-19

Rheumatology conditions and COVID-19

BMI Calculator

UK Government Working Safely During Coronavirus publications:

Construction and other outdoor work

Factories, plants and warehouses

Homes

Labs and research facilities

Offices and contact centres

Restaurants offering takeaway or delivery

Shops and branches

Vehicles