

13<sup>th</sup> April 2022

Dear business owner,

## **Reducing the spread of respiratory infections, including COVID-19, in the workplace**

On 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022 the working safely during coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance was replaced with [guidance around reducing the spread of respiratory infections, including COVID-19, in the workplace](#). This marks another step forward on the journey to living alongside Covid, however the virus has not gone away and Covid infection levels across the city remain high.

It is important that we all continue to do all we can to help keep ourselves and others safe and as a business, organisation or an employer that means continuing to comply with your legal obligations relating to health and safety, employment and equality duties. The principles of infection control and management remain the same, we have listed below a number of actions you should continue to take to protect yourself, your staff and your customers.

### **1. Encourage and enable vaccination for COVID-19**

Vaccination remains our best defence against the virus and it is important that those living and working in Sunderland get all recommended doses for the best protection. Employers, in accordance with their existing legal obligations, may wish to consider how best to support and enable staff who wish to be vaccinated. This can be found at: [COVID-19 vaccination: guide for employers - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-vaccination-guide-for-employers)

### **2. Update your health and safety risk assessment, including the risk from COVID-19 in the light of changes to the COVID-19 regulations**

Under the COSHH Regulations, employers must still protect workers who come into contact with COVID-19 due to their work activity, such as health and social care workers caring for infectious patients, but the requirement for every employer to explicitly consider COVID-19 in their health and safety risk assessment has been removed. Employers may still choose to consider COVID-19 in their risk assessments and review Health and Safety Executive guidance for updates. These can be found at [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) – Advice for workplaces \(hse.gov.uk\)](https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/)

### **3. Management of members of staff who are at risk of serious illness from COVID-19**

Some workers are at a greater risk of serious illness from COVID-19. There is specific [guidance for people whose immune system means that they are at higher risk](#), because they have a reduced ability to fight infections.

4. **Staff should stay at home if they have COVID-19 symptoms or are feeling unwell**

Respiratory and other infections such as diarrhoea and vomiting can spread easily between people. It is important for staff and employers to be aware of symptoms so they can take actions to reduce the risk of spreading the infection to other people. Though they will not be legally required to self-isolate they should not be encouraged to come to work. This approach will reduce the risk to others.

The symptoms of COVID-19 and other respiratory infections are very similar so it is not possible to tell if you have COVID-19, flu or another infection based on symptoms alone. You can find information about these [symptoms on the NHS website](#) .

Free testing for COVID-19 for most people ended on 31 March. If a member of staff is unwell with symptoms of a respiratory infection, such as COVID-19, they should follow the [guidance for people with symptoms of a respiratory infection such as COVID-19](#).

5. **Provide adequate ventilation**

Bringing in fresh air to occupied spaces can help to reduce the concentration of respiratory particles, lowering the risk of airborne transmission of respiratory viruses. The risk of catching or passing on COVID-19 and other respiratory infections can be higher in certain places and when doing certain activities. When someone with an infection breathes, speaks, coughs or sneezes, they release respiratory particles which can contain the virus.

The Health and Safety Executive provides [guidance on how to assess and improve ventilation](#) in line with health and safety requirements under Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992.

6. **Maintain a clean workplace**

Keeping workplaces clean reduces the risk of infection and can reduce sickness in a workforce, it is especially important to regularly clean surfaces that people touch frequently. Employers should encourage their staff and customers to continue to wash or sanitise their hands more frequently and promote "[Catch it, Bin it, Kill it](#)" message.

7. **Outbreaks in the workplace**

There is no requirement to report workplace outbreaks of respiratory infections to your local public health team. However, if you experience high levels of people with respiratory symptoms or other infections in your workplace the actions detailed above here will help to reduce the spread, so they should be promoted and applied more rigorously. If you have any concerns and wish to speak to someone from the Council email [public.health@sunderland.gov.uk](mailto:public.health@sunderland.gov.uk)

8. **Promoting positive behaviours**

You will not always know whether someone you come into contact with is at higher risk of becoming seriously unwell from COVID-19 or other respiratory

infections. They could be colleagues or customers. To help protect people at risk we may meet it is important to follow the guidance outlined. There are also positive behaviours you can promote as a business which include mask wearing in crowded places, [good respiratory hygiene](#), offering access to hand sanitiser and ensuring there is enough space to maintain social distancing should an individual want to.

Employers should keep all their staff, contractors, customers and visitors up to date on how they are using and updating safety measures.

Sunderland City Council may be able to offer financial advice to you or a member of your staff. For more information visit [www.sunderland.gov.uk/article/17326/Financial-support-and-money-advice](http://www.sunderland.gov.uk/article/17326/Financial-support-and-money-advice)

If you have any queries or need further support, the latest national information and guidance can be found at [www.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.gov.uk/coronavirus) and [www.nhs.uk/coronavirus](http://www.nhs.uk/coronavirus). Or visit [www.sunderland.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.sunderland.gov.uk/coronavirus) for information about how the latest developments are impacting residents and businesses in Sunderland.

Thank you for your continued efforts to keep our communities safe.

Yours sincerely,



Gerry Taylor  
Executive Director of Public Health for Sunderland