As isolation is eased and consideration is given to return to work, you are required to use this guide as part of the risk assessment process for resumption of services. It includes questions to be considered to ensure control in the workplace. It should be used to create a specific Premises Covid-19 Risk Assessment for each building which MUST be recorded on the Lexi H&S System.

Context

Before a risk assessment is undertaken, the assessor must first determine 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.

This guidance should be considered in conjunction with your existing task and building risk assessments and any COVID-19 assessments that relate to your teams.

Risk assessment

Hazard

The risk assessment must recognise the virus as a high hazard. It should also reflect that the virus is spread in minute water droplets that are expelled from the body through sneezing, coughing, talking and breathing. The virus can be transferred to the hands and from there to surfaces. It can survive on surfaces for a period after transfer (depending on such things as the surface type, its moisture content and temperature). The risk assessment should conclude that if it is passed from one person to another, while many survive infection, some may die from the virus. It should be regarded as a high hazard.

Likelihood of Exposure

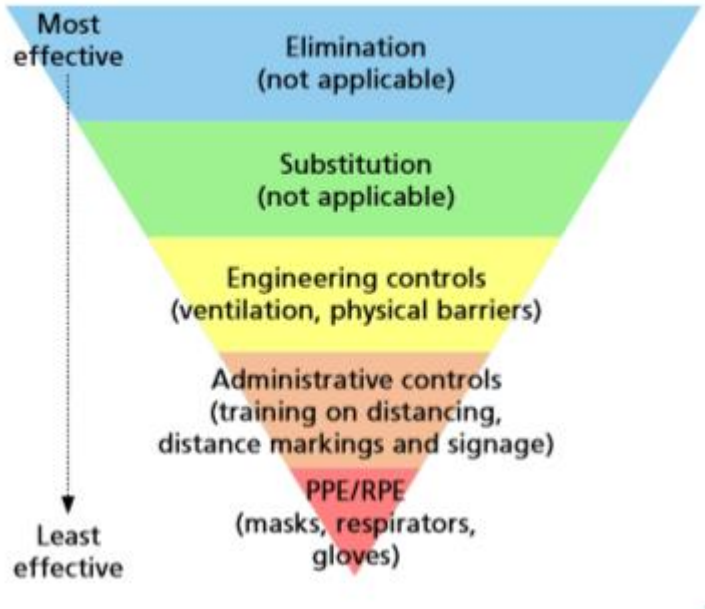
Consideration must be given to how exposed people are. The following questions should be considered: -

Question	Response
While at ~~work~~work, how might employees meet people with the virus?	
How frequently and for how long are they likely to meet?	
Where are employees meeting people who may have the virus and does this increase exposure (e.g. in a confined space, in a well-ventilated environment or outside)?	
Can any of your team operate part or all of the time homeworking? If they can then they should not be reverting to being in a building every day. What tasks do they need to be in the building for/ what equipment do they need to access?	

Once the answers to these questions are understood, controls to mitigate them can be better considered and implemented.

Control

The safety hierarchy of control can serve you well in considering what can be done. Any mitigation controls devised and implemented must reduce exposure of employees and anyone else who could be infected by your employees. Decisions about what may be done must be realistic and reasonably practicable: achievable given the resources available.



Elimination is the best form of control. Can we eliminate the virus? Only through vaccination, so there is little that can be done by us. This is reliant on government response.

Substitution: replacing the virus for something less harmful is not possible.

Engineering controls place a physical barrier between the person and the hazard, or provide mechanical reduction of the hazard. Placing screens between people (e.g. at points where staff would have face to face contact with the public) will interrupt the flow of air from one person to another and therefore provide protection.

Providing ventilation is also an option. Care must be taken if ventilation is to be considered. The fundamental question is where the potentially infected water droplets are ventilated to. It is no good if they are blown onto other people or surfaces and increase exposure elsewhere. But as a principle it is worthy of some consideration e.g. ask whether the job must be done in a workshop, or can be done outside. But then also consider exposure to ultraviolet radiation and other risk. Ventilation is a good control if it takes infected air away from people and transfers it to somewhere where the virus will not do harm.

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

Designing the working week

Questions and considerations about designing a safe working week should include: -

How can you redesign the working week to allow mobile and continued homeworking?	
Buildings will only be open 4 days a week, how will you organise this for the members of your team?	
Could you have a booking system for office desks?	
Could equipment (printers, stationery, measurement equipment etc.) be located in another room so staff don't need to access the working office areas?	
Where there is more than 1 team in the building, is it possible to coordinate specific days for individual teams to all be in?	

Designing a safe workplace

Questions and considerations about designing a safe workplace should include: -

Can you redesign the workplace to maintain social distancing?	
How will you ensure 2m between people at desks? – Adjacent desks should not be occupied, opposite desks should not be occupied. For example in a bank of 4 desks only 2 desks at a diagonal should be used.	
Can you repurpose meeting rooms to spread employees out?	
How will you hold meetings? Teams? Identify which meetings you think cannot be carried out remotely and list these. Only large meeting rooms for small numbers?	
Can you reduce space pressure by reducing the number of employees required to work in an area (e.g. a proportion remains working from home)? Booking systems? Days set aside for specific teams?	
In which places do people find it difficult to avoid one another (e.g. security points, lifts, stairs, lobbies, canteens, toilets, resource rooms, hot desks)? How can these areas be controlled? Can they be controlled? Are there areas where social distancing cannot be ensured that should remain closed at this time?	
What can you do to smooth out their use and reduce this pressure (e.g. phased shift and break times, move from 5 to 7 day working, closure)?	

Can you provide more hand washing or sterilisation facilities around the workplace?	
Have you noted the places where most people commonly touch (e.g. equipment control panels, handles, handrails, kettles, hot desk surfaces)? How can this be managed?	

Cleaning

Cleaning is a vital control and deserves some careful thought: -

Have you considered how you keep commonly touched surfaces sterile and how much more frequently they need to be cleaned? With an increase in numbers in the setting it is likely that there is more opportunity for transfer by touch. Corridor Doors and doors leading onto corridors **MUST NOT** be wedged open.	
Are there sufficient wipes available for staff to ensure all areas that need it are being frequently sterilised (kettles, printers etc.) and any surfaces they touch are cleansed and sterilised after ~~use.?~~use.	

Work Equipment

Questions and considerations about work equipment include: -

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 someone 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? NOTE: alcohol based gels should not be stored near sources of ignition (e.g. kettles, toasters, lights, heaters, printers) and staff must be advised of the fire risk and need to allow their hands to fully dry before touching anything.	

Safe Systems of Work

Questions and considerations about safe systems of work include: -

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?	
When employees and contractors/ partners must work together, how will you agree Covid-19 control standards?	
What adjustments to contractor control may be necessary?	

Safe Systems of Work

Questions and considerations for safe people: -

Is it necessary to know if employees are harbouring the virus and are perhaps asymptomatic?	
If so, do you test temperature regularly during the day, or do you rely on routine antibody testing?	
How do you ensure workers know what Covid-19 controls are required in their work?	
Do employees know how they can reduce exposure to the virus travelling to and from work?	
What advice can be provided?	

Personal Protective Equipment

The last resort in the hierarchy of risk control is personal protective equipment. It is considered the weakest control because it relies on people using it correctly. It introduces many possibilities for error: being the right specification, its cleanliness, its storage, its replacement and availability. There has been much discussion about the provision of PPE in the media, but this is focused on the medical care environment, not in normal workplaces.

Considerations include: -

If gloves are provided, the virus can still be transferred to the surface. If the wearer then touches their face, they could contract the virus. Perhaps frequent hand washing or sterilisation is a better option.	
The wearing of a paper face mask may reduce the virus being spread from the wearer to others, but its effectiveness of protecting the wearer is debatable. In any case the longer it is worn, the greater the potential viral loading on its surface. Touching the mask and then the face may increase exposure if masks are not changed regularly. If they are taken off and left lying around, potentially this	

increases exposure to others who may come into contact with it, e.g. cleaners.	
Plastic aprons will provide some protection for clothing, but rarely cover the sleeves which may come into contact the face too.	

Ensure where appropriate your general assessments covering working tasks includes consideration of the provision of PPE

There is much debate about the non-medical usefulness of PPE in this pandemic. Many scientific studies are being undertaken to improve our knowledge. It is far better for organisations to seek to control exposure rather than rely on PPE. Prevention is a more effective principle. While provision may reduce employee anxiety, its effectiveness in general working situations has yet to be fully proven.

All of these questions and considerations relating to the workplace, equipment, safe systems of work and people will lead to the design of good procedures and management systems that will help to reduce exposure to the virus.

A final note of caution. Do not lose sight of the normal activity safety and health risks posed by your operations. It remains important to maintain effective control of exposure to these risks too.

Your general risk assessments and individual (person) risk assessments should be reviewed to ensure they cover ongoing / new medical conditions and the responsibility of all staff to report / declare any new conditions that may put them at risk.