



Employers Guidance for Temporary Homeworkers During COVID-19 Pandemic



Background

In response to the spread of Coronavirus in the UK, the Government has introduced measures for social distancing in order to tackle the spread of the virus across the population.

In order to comply with this directive, many businesses and employers have taken the decision, wherever possible, to designate their staff as homeworkers.

This means many employers are now faced with a new dynamic of managing safety in the home workplace which can create uncertainty on how to discharge their duties.

This guide aims to pose and answers questions, outlining measures an employer can take to ensure the continued safety of their employees working from home.

Do I still need to do risk assessments?

Yes

Risk assessments are still very much applicable. Whilst employees would be expected to be conversant with their own home environment, risks to their health and safety, and how their work could affect others should still be considered.

Employers should not make homeworking 'invasive' however the employer should consider risks associated with the work being carried out and the working environment.

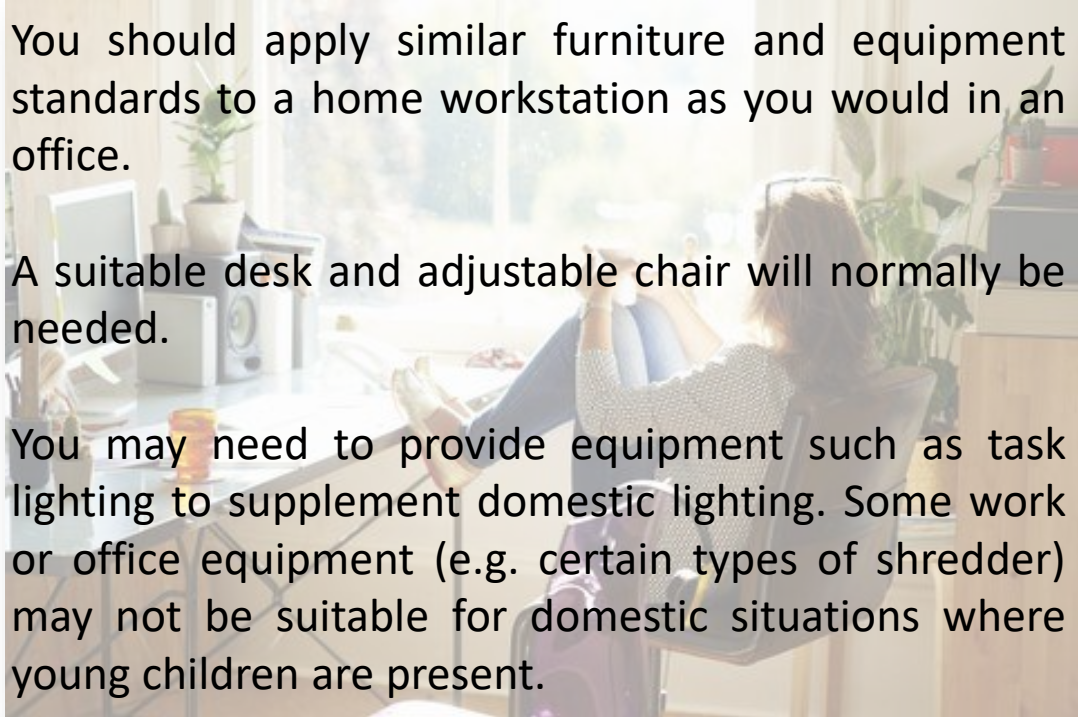
What to consider

The common risk assessment issues you need to consider are:

- work environment
- work equipment
- mental wellbeing
- working alone
- fire
- travel

The assessments should consider the working environment and the needs of the individual employee. This will likely require you may to train remote workers to carry out their own assessments or they could be talked through the assessment remotely using video facilities.

What is a suitable & safe home working environment?



You should apply similar furniture and equipment standards to a home workstation as you would in an office.

A suitable desk and adjustable chair will normally be needed.

You may need to provide equipment such as task lighting to supplement domestic lighting. Some work or office equipment (e.g. certain types of shredder) may not be suitable for domestic situations where young children are present.

Sheds / garages are not generally recommended. Also be careful about letting your staff choose attics / cellars, because these spaces often have limited access, poor temperature or ventilation control and a lack of natural light.

If an employee is based at home and uses a laptop regularly for long periods at the same workstation, you'll need to provide accessories, such as a mouse, keyboard, screen (or laptop riser) or docking station.

Carrying out a homeworking assessment

Have workers been given guidance on how to set up a computer workstation ergonomically?

There is some very helpful information [here](#) on how employers can help temporary homeworkers.

Workers could be given guidance and training on how to assess workstations remotely.

MSAFE have a combined training and assessment tool [Ergowize](#)

Further guidance can be provided by HSE <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/ck1.pdf>

What hours are they working and on what type of work / project?

Are there arrangements in place for providing remote workers with information, instruction & training?

This could be done using the MSAFE homeworking training course online:

[ROSPA Approved Homeworking Training](#)

Alternatively, supervisors could undertake video calls to train and instruct individual or groups of homeworkers on what is expected.

Carrying out a homeworking assessment

Clearly there may be many challenges outside of the employer's control that may mean providing a suitable workstation within the home environment is not always reasonably practicable (e.g. Physical space, available equipment, supply chain issues etc). It is important that employees are properly briefed on how they can manage their own risks by moving frequently and taking regular breaks. See [Temporary Homeworking Infographic](#)

The worse your position is, the more you must move!

No matter the situation, you can look after yourself by regularly moving and taking breaks.

Plan your day and if any tasks do not require you to be using your device, move away.

Tasks like conference calls, reading documents, thinking, making notes could be done on a sofa, easy chair or even lying on the floor. We all get so used to staying in one place during the day, we do not change our habits when we can.

For further support visit posturite.co.uk and find out how we can help.



Managing home workers

Do line managers understand their responsibilities for the health and safety of remote workers under their control?

How are they being monitored and communicated with?

Are arrangements in place for controlling homeworking issues, such as stress and general mental health?

Are health and safety monitoring arrangements in place for the homeworkers?

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Mental wellbeing

It's important to maintain good communication systems.

Formal means of contact with remote workers to minimise feelings of isolation and stress.

Consider:

- video conferencing regular 121 calls
- Slack/other team messaging apps
- team calls (e.g. Microsoft Teams/ Zoom)
- newsletters / online forums
- access to helplines e.g. IT support / training
- access to H&S and HR reps

It's important to make sure that remote workers don't feel cut-off from decision-making.

Consultation, involvement and representation of remote workers should also be encouraged because they're effective ways of determining whether health and safety arrangements are good enough, and of making improvements.

You can equip line managers and other champions to be able to spot the signs of work-related mental health issues by providing [mental health first aid training](#) or similar sessions.

Monitoring

Clear & consistent management arrangement reduce risks.

However, it's only through regular monitoring that you can be sure risks are being controlled adequately and the systems in place are effective.

Remote workers' managers or should make regular enquiries to make sure the employee is following safe practices and not experiencing aches or symptoms of stress.

The risk assessment should be subject to regular review taking into account any conditions that change in the homeworking environment.

Are workers still travelling, visiting clients sites or other places for work? Does your risk assessment address this? Is it reviewed and does it take account of changing conditions at client sites?

Are clients/other work related persons visiting your employees? How is this controlled to ensure social distancing?

Sources of further information

IOSH:

[Guidance from IOSH on home / remote working](#), including a useful template for home working assessments.

[Covid-19: IOSH advice for managing remote workers](#)

[HSE Homeworkers](#)

[RoSPA Approved Pandemic Awareness e-learning](#)

Self reporting app: <https://covid.joinzoe.com/>

Information / training that could act as a tool box talk: <http://www.germdefence.org>



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