



GUIDANCE Note

COVID-19 and Engineering Services: guidance (GN 2) revised

Title	Working in close proximity
Purpose	Template indicating measures that enable <i>essential work</i> to be carried out closer than government/PHE social distancing (2 metre) guidelines

Employers operating on-site (construction, maintenance or emergency call-out) during the Covid-19 (coronavirus) pandemic must ensure they are protecting their workforce and controlling the potential spread of viral infection.

Work on-site (and travel to, from and between sites) should *only continue* if:

- it can be carried out in line with the guidance issued by Public Health England (PHE);
- it can be undertaken without compromising safety and health;
- it is done in accordance with the latest Government guidance and current Construction Leadership Council (CLC) Site Operating Procedure (SOP); and
- workers can travel safely and responsibly.

The three *most effective ways to prevent the spread of coronavirus* on site and when travelling are:

- social distancing;
- effective hand washing; and
- thorough cleaning of all contactable surfaces and equipment – plus preventing unnecessary sharing of items or equipment.

See PHE and government guidelines and the current CLC SOP.

All activities need to be planned and organised to **avoid all unnecessary close proximity (less than 2m) between workers and others**, to minimise the risk of spread of infection, and no work should be carried out that requires skin to skin contact.

For any activity:

- Consult with workers beforehand about the planned mitigating measures
- Remind the workforce daily about social distancing, hygiene and all other necessary mitigating measures.

Explore every available option possible before deploying anyone on close proximity tasks.

1. Eliminate close working where possible

Firstly, seek to *eliminate the need for any type of close proximity working* by e.g.

- Planning and arranging tasks and any other activity so they can be done by one person, or by maintaining social distancing measures (2 metres) and preventing overcrowding
- Considering mechanical aids to reduce worker interface and proximity

2. Where closer proximity working is necessary and unavoidable

In line with the current CLC SOP and government guidelines, where it is *not possible* to follow social distancing guidelines in full for a particular activity, then:

1. “consider whether that activity needs to continue for the business to operate.” If this is so;
2. “take all mitigating actions possible” (applying the hierarchy of measures below) to reduce the risk of transmission between workers and others.
 - Comprehensive hygiene and clearing measures must apply at all times (government/PHE guidelines/CLC SOP)
 - Increase fresh air ventilation in any indoor/enclosed spaces.

Conduct a suitable and sufficient **risk assessment**, *communicate the significant findings with the workforce* and *introduce preventative measures and a safe system of work* (method statement) to control the risk of viral transmission.

Reduce

Where social distancing measures (minimum 2 metres) cannot be applied:

- Minimise the *frequency and time* workers are within 2 metres of each other
- Minimise the number of workers involved in the task

Workers should work side by side or facing away from each other: avoid *face to face* working wherever possible.

Isolate

If workers must work within 2 metres of each other, keep the team:

- Together (do not change workers within teams) – also known as ‘cohorting’
- As small as possible
- Away from other workers or others, where possible

Control

Where it is *essential* to carry out a task and work within 2 metres:

- Keep the activity *as short as possible*
- Consider using a permit or other authorisation process for close proximity activities

- Provide designated supervision (which may include a ‘compliance champion’) to monitor and manage compliance with close proximity preventative measures
- Consider any scope for *temporary barriers* between workers.

2a. PPE (including RPE) and face coverings

For typical construction and maintenance activity, government guidance and CLC SOPv4 do not support the use of RPE (e.g. tight-fitting masks) as a protective measure against coronavirus. However, government guidance adds that, following **risk assessment**, face coverings (e.g. cotton masks) *may* be selected (along with other PPE) to further mitigate the risk from close proximity work:

- 1) as part of “all mitigating actions possible” and/or
- 2) in response to any client or main contractor requirements.

Face coverings and full-face shields (visors) may lower *viral exhalation risk*, notably from anyone who has COVID-19 but is *not yet showing symptoms*. However, they *do not provide significant inhalation protection and they may become contaminated*. If selected there should be *collective use* where possible (i.e. maximising the number in a ‘close proximity’ group who wear a face covering or visor).

Eye protection can help to protect the eyes from airborne droplets, but visors may negate the need for light eye protection (subject to risk assessment). Certain ‘valved’ face masks present a potential *viral exhalation* risk, which may e.g. be mitigated by wearing a visor.

Any face coverings or visors should be distributed by the employer, along with instructions for use, maintenance, replacement, and disposal. ‘Homemade’ or ‘site improvised’ face coverings or visors *should not be used*.

Government guidance does not support the general use of:

- FFP3 and other tight-fitting masks

However, the use of tight-fitting masks is still required *if risk assessment shows they are necessary to protect against other significant workplace respiratory health hazards* (beyond coronavirus).

- surgical masks.

No-one should rely *solely on RPE or face covering* as the mitigating measure against coronavirus. The hierarchy of measures above must first be deployed, to mitigate the risk as far as reasonably practicable. RPE and face coverings are last in the hierarchy of protection against *any airborne hazard* for reasons that include:

- ‘face fit testing’ is required for half mask RPE, plus ‘fit checking’ before work starts
- RPE (and particularly face covering) protection can deteriorate during use
- wearing RPE or face covering – even if it provides any extra protection - may change worker behaviour, undermining hygiene and cleaning good practice
- face masks and cloth/cotton face coverings do not protect the eyes
- the standard and use of face coverings can vary greatly, *greatly affecting* any protection they might provide.

Donning and doffing PPE and face coverings, and sanitisation and waste disposal, must be carried out properly, to reduce the risk of viral contamination and spread, along with thorough hand cleaning. If selected, visors should be washed following every shift in hot soapy water, or with antibacterial cleaning wipes.

RPE in locations with elevated risk of viral spread

Additional PPE (which *may include* RPE such as tight-fitting masks and surgical masks) *should be considered*, subject to risk assessment, in work environments where there is *elevated risk* of viral spread) e.g.:

- where persons are shielding, or with COVID-19 symptoms; or
- confirmed Covid-19 cases may be present

See the ECA/BESA **GN 1** guide on working in ‘Specific Environments’ (elevated risk of transmission). Examples of specific environments might be health or care home settings, or some emergency domestic settings.

Higher-protection types of RPE such as positive air pressure respirators, can offer effective onsite coronavirus respiratory and face protection if necessary (e.g. in confined spaces), provided they have effective air filters.

Site requirements to wear RPE

Any overarching (e.g. site owner) requirement to wear/not wear PPE (including RPE) or face covering should be dealt with in discussion with the site owner and/or main contractor.

3. Key sources of official information and advice include:

- www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/construction-and-other-outdoor-work
- SOPv4: www.constructionleadershipcouncil.co.uk/news/site-operating-procedures-version-4-published/
- For more on face fit testing RPE: www.hse.gov.uk/respiratory-protective-equipment/fit-testing-basics.htm
- See also for Wales: <https://gov.wales/taking-all-reasonable-measures-maintain-physical-distancing-workplace>

Important note:

This (revised) guidance note (GN 2) has been drawn up by the BESA and ECA to help contractors working in the engineering services sector to work in closer proximity than the PHE general guidelines of 2m, where this activity is essential and unavoidable.

GN2 provides guidance only – it must be adapted as necessary to fit the prevailing site and other circumstances and based on a suitable and sufficient risk assessment. ECA and BESA can provide further supporting information for respective Members on conducting suitable and sufficient risk assessments.

Comments on GN2 are welcome and should be directed to either:

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