



‘Working safely during COVID-19 in construction and other outdoor work’: Guidance for employers, employees and the self-employed

The following provides an early, headline, review of new or salient issues in this 31pp ‘construction and other outdoor work’ guide. ‘Working outdoors’ includes construction, energy and utilities, other infrastructure, railway services and street and highway services.

The following does not aim to cover all the content in the document above, and notably not content that refers to *already established good practice* around social distancing, hygiene and surfaces cleaning etc. (such as in the CLC SOP). For the full and exact text, please see the ‘construction and other outdoor work’ document at: www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/construction-and-other-outdoor-work

The new ‘construction and outdoors’ document has been prepared by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) “with input from firms, unions, industry bodies and the devolved administrations in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and in consultation with Public Health England (PHE) and the HSE”.

Public health is devolved in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and the guidance should be considered alongside local public health and safety requirements and legislation in Wales, NI and Scotland.

Headline review

Three issues which present challenges and difficulties in the industry are close proximity working, choices around RPE (masks etc.) and vehicle travel. For this reason, these issues are highlighted below. Areas of particular note are underlined.

The document says all decisions and activities must be based on a **suitable and sufficient risk assessment** (RA).

Close proximity work

Close proximity work should be exceptional, rather than the norm. Where the social distancing guidelines cannot be followed in full, in relation to a particular activity, businesses should consider whether that activity needs to continue for the business to operate, and if so, take all the mitigating actions possible to reduce the risk of transmission between their staff.

The document says that mitigating actions for close proximity working include:

- increasing the frequency of hand washing and surface cleaning.
- keeping the activity time involved as short as possible – note there is no reference to ‘up to 15 minutes’ in this document, in any context (c.f. CLC SOPv3)
- using screens or barriers to separate people from each other (e.g. during vehicle travel)
- using back-to-back or side-to-side working (rather than face-to-face) whenever possible.
- reducing the number of people each person has contact with by using ‘fixed teams or partnering’ (so each person works with only a few others).

If people must work face-to-face for a sustained period with more than a small group of fixed partners, then risk assess whether the activity can safely go ahead. No one is obliged to work in an unsafe work environment.

There is no mention of applying a hierarchy of preventative measures but rather the application of RA to decide on the necessary mitigating measures.

Risk assessment should also have particular regard to whether the people doing the work are *especially vulnerable* to COVID-19.

Publication of risk assessments by larger businesses

The document says “Share the results of your risk assessment with your workforce. If possible, you should consider publishing the results on your website (and we would expect all employers with over 50 workers to do so)”.

A notice is also provided with the document, that “you should display in your workplace to show you have followed this guidance”.

RPE and face covering

The document does not advocate or support the use of tight fitting or surgical RPE* (and there is no mention of RPE as a mitigating measure for close proximity work) but it refers to the (optional) use of face coverings (e.g. cotton mask). This is to provide some protection to others from external viral transfer from an asymptomatic wearer. “A face covering can be very simple and may be worn in enclosed spaces where social distancing isn’t possible. It just needs to cover your mouth and nose”.

There is no specific mention of using visors, though they are essentially a face covering.

**Background content (where it is assumed that mention of PPE includes RPE, which is not specifically mentioned at all in the main text)*

“When managing the risk of COVID-19, additional PPE beyond what you usually wear is not beneficial. COVID-19 is a different type of risk to the risks you normally face in a workplace, and needs to be managed through social distancing, hygiene and fixed teams or partnering, not through the use of PPE. The exception is clinical settings, like a hospital, or a small handful of other roles for which Public Health England advises use of PPE”.

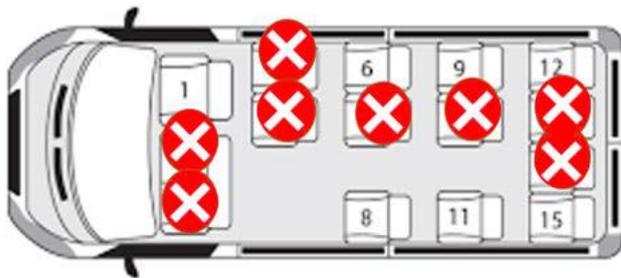
“Workplaces should not encourage the precautionary use of extra PPE. Supplies of PPE, including face masks, must continue to be reserved for those who need them to protect against risks in their workplace, such as health and care workers, and those in industrial settings like those exposed to dust hazards (if needed for other health hazards, that’s not just fine it’s required).

“A face covering is not the same as a face mask, such as the surgical masks or respirators used by health and care workers”.

According the Build UK (12 May), the new document does not yet provide “clear guidance from the Government or Public Health England on the *use of face masks* by construction workers”.

Travel

There is a short mention of travel in this document, and an interesting diagram suggesting that acceptable distancing is possible in certain vehicles (see picture). It also says “Maintain consistent pairing where two-person deliveries are required”. Such advice might be applicable to paired travel to and from site, for example.



Interesting diagram on spread of seating in vans (note 50% capacity usage)

Note that similar ‘domestic’, ‘factories’ and ‘vehicles’ guides which may also be of significance to Members. These are not covered here but they will be reviewed shortly.



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