

# Challenges of home working in a time of COVID-19

Following the Government's confirmation that the existing lockdown has been extended by a further three weeks, employers will continue to be encouraged to make all efforts to enable employees to work from home.

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**Please note: the information contained in our legal updates are correct as of the original date of publication**

Following the Government's confirmation that the existing lockdown has been extended by a further three weeks, employers will continue to be encouraged to make all efforts to enable employees to work from home. Whilst home working may once have been recognised as a sterling example of a flexible approach to work, we are all now working in decidedly inflexible times.

## Lone working/stress

Employers owe the same health and safety responsibilities to employees working from home as to any other employee. The HSE recognises that those working alone and without direct supervision face higher risks than those in a more traditional workplace setting.

Whilst "old" data, in 2017 the UN reported that 41% of remote workers reported high levels of stress compared to 25% of office workers. That data is based on a business as usual model. Fast forward to March/April 2020, at a time of crisis, employers need to consider the implications of an extended lockdown on the mental wellbeing of their remote workers who may have additional concerns such as childcare, job security, fear coupled with social isolation.

Employers should:

- Assess the risk to the general employee population and retain documents to evidence the steps taken or not and the reasons for doing so. Specific assessment may be needed for those remote workers who are already on an employer's radar as vulnerable.
- Enable managers to manage remotely (Skype for Business)
- Keep employees engaged (communication/information sharing whilst the use of Zoom (subject to security concerns) has emerged as the platform of choice for teams to join in with morning yoga sessions, team quizzes or simply to socialise as a group).
- Raise awareness of mental ill health but provide support (links to Human Resources, EAP schemes and Mental Health First Aiders).
- Encourage staff to take regular breaks and to engage in physical exercise, whether this be by joining in with Joe Wicks at 9am each morning, running laps around the garden or by following the "feel good moves" of Mr Motivator.
- Be understanding and prepared to take a flexible approach in situations where staff report that they are struggling to cope with balancing their work with their home lives.

Browne Jacobson has an active Wellbeing Network group on Yammer who provide lots of ideas and advice from setting boundaries, creating structure, the healthy use of social media and the benefits of keeping physically active.

## Workstation assessments

The HSE has advised that existing temporary arrangements for home working do not require formal workstation assessments. Employees are however encouraged to do their best to have reasonable posture whilst using DSE at home.

The HSE has provided some [helpful guidance and a short video](#) to assist those working from home as well as a useful [DSE checklist](#) for employees to follow.

Where employees do not have a dedicated desk to work from at home, they are encouraged to adapt what they have to create a comfortable working environment by using cushions to provide lumbar support or by using books to raise the height of their DSE. The [UK has embraced these recommendations](#) with a sense of good humour and creativity with ironing boards being used as standing desks.

## Comment

The extension of the current lockdown means our return to more normal times remains over the horizon. Employers and employees will be expected to continue to demonstrate their resolve. At a time when 99 year-old Captain Tom Moore has inspired the nation by raising more than £29 million for the NHS, the message to all employers and employees is to keep communicating with each other and very much to keep calm and carry on.

## Contact



Matthew Harpin

Partner

[matthew.harpin@brownejacobson.com](mailto:matthew.harpin@brownejacobson.com)

+44 (0)121 237 3970

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