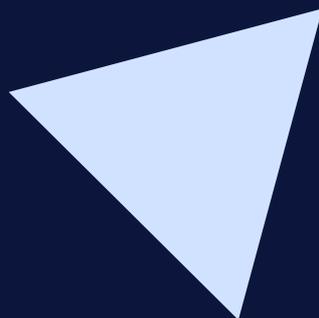




Workforce safety in the midst of a global pandemic



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The world of work has been thrown upside down in recent weeks. The threat of the coronavirus and risk of it spreading has forced businesses to adapt and implement remote working measures where possible. While remote working isn't a new concept, it's a practice that companies have been slow to embrace.

For some employers, this may well be the first time your workforce is working remotely. For others, it may be a standard arrangement. We have compiled this book to provide some helpful tips on how to make the most of your distributed environment, whatever your situation.

Employer responsibilities in a time of crisis

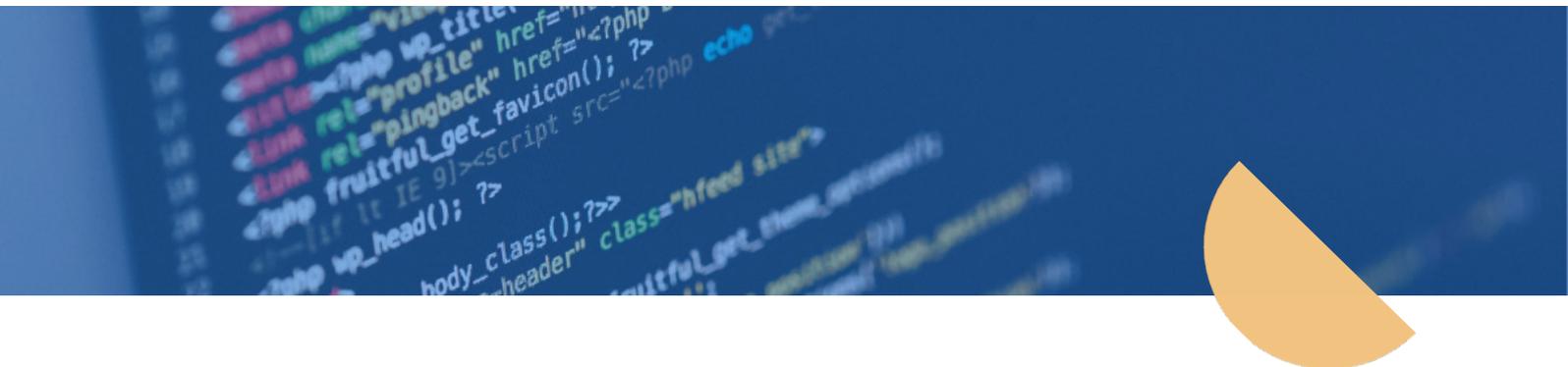
The COVID-19 outbreak has taken many employers by surprise, highlighting the importance of implementing a HR contingency plan to protect the wellbeing of your staff in the event of a crisis. With large numbers of employees now working from the comfort of their own home, it is still vital that employers and owners do not overlook their legal and moral duties and fulfil their obligation of keeping employees safe and healthy.

Keep informed

Government and public health advice is a fast-moving issue, so be certain to stay on top of the situation as it develops. This enables you to keep your employees informed and continually make the best decisions for your staff and company. We recommend referring your employees to official and expert medical sources if they reveal any major concerns about infection – these can be found at [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk), [the National Health Service](https://www.nhs.uk) and [NHS 111 online coronavirus service](https://111.nhs.uk).

Clean workplace

Whether your company is still operating in a traditional workplace environment or you have been forced to adopt remote working, you still have a duty to promote high standards of cleanliness, personal hygiene and social distancing. Encourage regular hand washing, wiping down of workstations and if possible, provide your employees with access to an alcohol-based sanitiser to prevent the transmission of bacteria when soap and water aren't readily available.

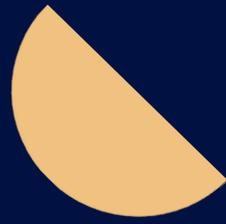


Safeguarding data

With a large proportion of your workforce working remotely, your organisation's data is more likely to be compromised. Employers should be prepared for the enhanced strain on their computer networks and along with their staff, should be able to recognise the potential threats and exposure to the company's information assets.

Adam Matthews from KryptoKloud advises taking advantage of security measures such as endpoint security technologies that run regular anti-virus checks, and keep all software updated.

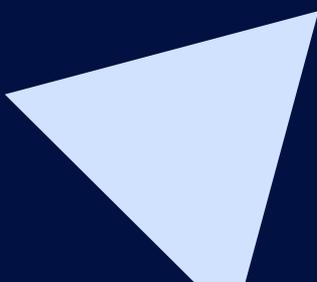
As your remote working teams will most likely use their home WiFi network, check with them to make sure it's secure. It's common for the default name and password to remain unchanged when it's first set up, making the network vulnerable. These can be easily changed online through the network provider's website. Once updated, Adam also recommends "changing the administrative account details to prevent criminals from accessing the network settings."



Mental health

One of the biggest issues that workers have struggled to overcome is the dramatic cut-off from their colleagues and the everyday chit-chat within the office. Methods to maintain constant interaction between your workforce are outlined later in this document. Still, as an employer, you need to ensure that you stay in frequent contact with your staff to offer support and ascertain if they are struggling with any mental health-related issues.

Hold regular telephone calls and try to be flexible in your approach – focus on both their stress and productivity levels given the dramatic change in circumstances. Don't forget to see the wider picture – many people will be anxious during this time and likely to have escalating fears about friends and family members, especially those considered vulnerable.



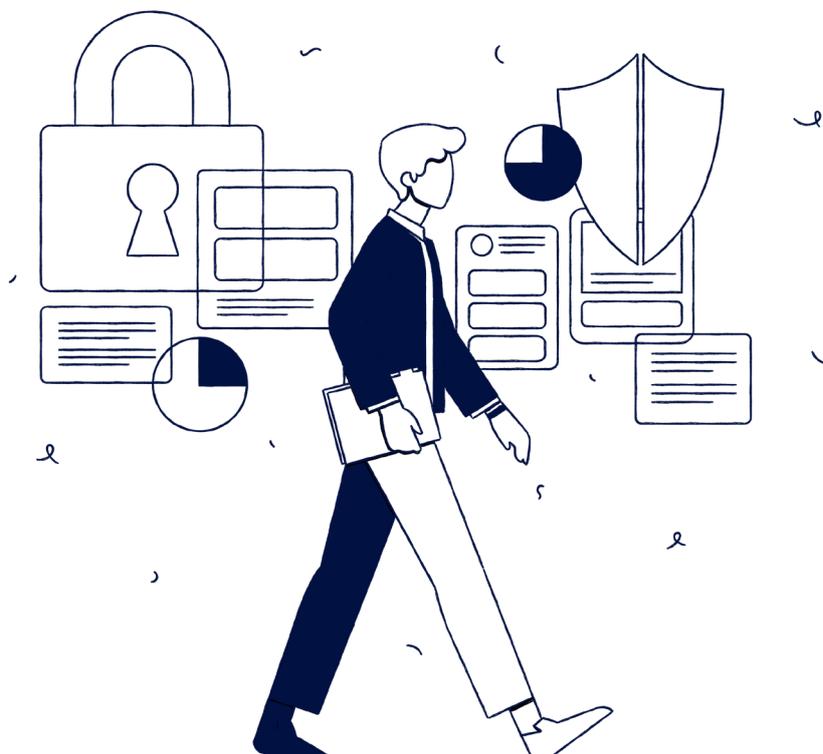
Stay professional

The reality of remote working is that many will see it as an opportunity to roll out of bed directly into their office chair. As a manager, you must lead by example – this includes dressing appropriately as if you are still going into work and taking important calls in a distraction-free space. If necessary, prepare a shared document with advice for all your staff, covering ways to avoid common remote working pitfalls, while helping them to remain professional and productive while working from home (WFH).

Health and safety

As with office-based equipment, employers should apply similar checks for remote workers wherever possible. From ergonomic chairs to height-adjustable desks and fire risks such as plugs and cables, creating a comfortable and safe working environment will help alleviate the health risks associated with using display screen equipment.

Consider whether your employees need any additional resources and if necessary, supply them with a practical workstation checklist so that both you and they are satisfied with their setup.



Embracing a remote working environment

While Tended has always offered a flexible and remote working policy with teams split across Lincoln, London, Oxford and Derby, and even Shenzhen, China, turning fully remote is new to many. We'll outline in this section how you can make the process easier, as well as some tools that might help the transition.

Communication

Regular contact and communication are imperative when shifting to remote work. Why not try a combination of a company wide weekly All Hands meeting, or daily smaller departmental standups, which last no longer than 15 minutes. Standups give everyone in the company a chance to catch up and talk about what they're working on, so everyone stays in the loop and has a chance to check on progress.

Video calls

Without face-to-face body cues, it can be easy to misread something and cause unintended friction. Ensure you encourage management to be clear and ask follow up questions to avoid miscommunication. Video calls through Slack or Zoom for quick discussions is even better, as you regain some of the visual cues lost when WFH.

Section two

Be careful not to overload the team with calls though – if a meeting no longer feels relevant now you're WFH, let it go. Trialling an afternoon or weekly slot where meetings are not allowed may also help your team get some quality deep work time at least once a week.

Use the right tools

Taking the time to decide what tools should be used for what is a good starting point. What should be an email, what is a quick Slack message, what should be a quick five-minute phone or Zoom call? Setting boundaries for the team on how to communicate can help avoid overload and cut down on miscommunication. You may not realise how much is missed when you can't stroll over to someone's desk with a coffee for a chat – a short two-minute call can help replace this.

Use Slack to communicate further. The Tended Team indicates when they're available to talk via status updates, such as if they're having lunch or stepped out for socially-distanced fresh air. Similarly, you could indicate deep work times where you don't want to be disturbed via a Slack update, or even schedule time on your calendar and make it public so everyone knows when you're in the zone.





Lead by example

The only way to get everyone on board is by leading from the top. Management and leads should demonstrate exemplary remote working practices, such as connecting with employees daily, ensuring everyone has clearly-defined work goals and can manage their workload. Remember to be open and honest with your team about how your productivity and time management is working.

Try organising a communication plan with individual employees – some people may need more checking in and reassurance than others, and put the trust in them to get work completed.

Remember WFH looks different for everyone

It's important to remember that this isn't the perfect remote working environment. Beyond the stress and worry that comes with COVID-19, everyone's WFH experience will be different for a variety of reasons. Socio-economic factors play a huge role in this, and being able to recognise that not everyone has that private study and a large garden to relax in out of hours is important.

They may also have childcare and family responsibilities to juggle too. Try reaching out to your team to let them know it's okay to not be at the laptop 9-5 by offering support and understanding of their situation. One suggestion is to set up a Slack channel to discuss and share tips on how to balance caregiving and a full-time job, or just to converse about how everyone is coping.





How to maintain productivity and culture when your teams are remote

Many of us may be worried about the company culture shifting or a loss of productivity when teams work remotely. The good news is creating a schedule of simple activities, and promoting non-work conversation can help boost and support these aspects without any major changes.

Set up a social Slack channel

Encouraging regular non-work conversations can help support morale and company culture. At Tended, we use a #social channel to discuss anything and everything; ranging from simply checking in with what everyone's been up to out of hours to debating who the master pancake maker is. This still works post COVID-19. It can help everyone stay connected and continue to embrace a more positive, relaxed company culture and build team bonds if they discover similar interests.

Virtual 'water cooler' talk

It's surprising how much time can be spent having a quick catch up while you make a drink or on lunch breaks. This social time can quickly translate into loneliness and miscommunication when WFH.



Why not try setting up a virtual 'coffee break' for your employees? Scheduling a 15-minute call to have a coffee and catch up, even once a week can make all the difference.

Some companies even use weekly 1:1s, where everyone in the company is randomly paired up with another, and they have a 10-minute catch up on strictly social topics.

Virtual social events

Missing Pub Fridays? You are not alone. Scheduling set times in everyone's calendar once a week can help boost morale and keep your company culture active while WFH. Arrange sessions in advance and get the team involved by encouraging everyone to run their own social session.

Try offering small rewards if they run a themed session, as it helps everyone get to know different things about each other. Even just having a drink and a chat for 30 minutes, or watching a film via screen share can help boost team morale if you don't have time to plan something more elaborate.

Breaks and time off

It can be easy to skip coffee or lunch breaks when WFH with the pressure of being at the laptop and being seen to be 'productive'. This can lead to stress and burnout, so encourage your teams to take their lunch break (not eat at their laptop), and to take regular short breaks to stretch, grab a coffee, or step outside the front door for some fresh air. Management should take responsibility and check-in with their teams to make sure they're taking proper breaks and rest periods.

Section three

Equally, encouraging your teams to remember they don't have to be at their desk all day is important. Remote work offers flexibility, which is why working patterns that suit the individual should be encouraged as this will boost productivity and help combat stress.

Working months without a holiday day can also lead to burnout, stress and low productivity. Encourage your teams to take some of their holiday time for a stay-cation. Work with your HR department to come up with suggestions and advice on how to relax at home and share with your teams.

Scheduling presentations

Why not try introducing regular presentations? Volunteers from the team could share something about a project they've been working on, or arrange presentations from relevant business leaders and professionals. They could be based on a whole range of topics, from charitable giving to mental health management, and gives your team the chance to learn and discuss something different. Many individuals and companies would happily offer their time to talk for free, as it gives them a great platform to promote themselves.



Is remote here to stay?

Once a slow-growing trend, remote working has been placed firmly into the limelight as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Before the bedlam, many employers were doubtful about the value of remote working and in particular, that it would lead to a sharp fall in productivity. However, it has proved to be a steep learning curve for businesses, with many profiting from the significant benefits and savings it brings.

It is worth noting that not all jobs have the luxury of being able to be performed remotely, but many companies and organisations are still able to adopt this method in some capacity. Has there ever been a better time than now for remote working to become a permanent fixture of the working landscape? This section looks into the reasons why employers should make working from home and flexible working schedules a regular part of their business model.

Reduced stress levels

Remote working enables employees to avoid traffic jams, office dramas and even eat healthier. This is because of an improved work-life balance, and being able to dedicate more time to family and concentrate on other interests and side passions.

According to the [UK Office of National Statistics](#), “commuters have lower life satisfaction, a lower sense that their daily activities are worthwhile, lower levels of happiness and higher anxiety on average than non-commuters.”

Access to a global talent pool

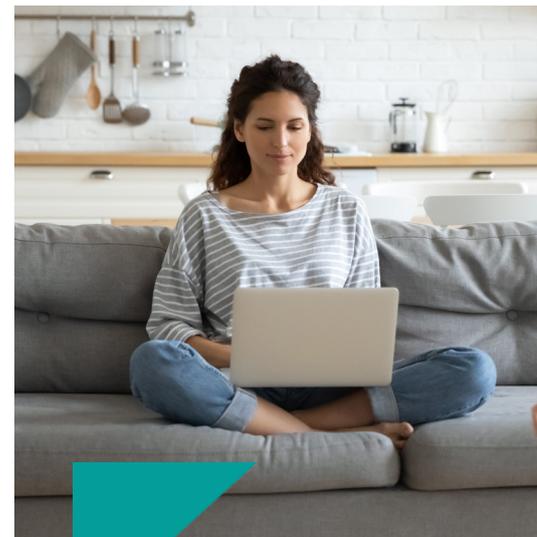
Lift the restrictions on your recruitment policy by offering working from home roles (providing the job can be carried out remotely!) It enables employers to throw their talent net much wider and gives them access to candidates that previously would have been inaccessible.

By eliminating location boundaries, companies can create diverse teams, increasing the likelihood that more radical ideas will arise and be explored. Being served by advantageous road and public transport links will also no longer be a prerequisite for many businesses.

Reduced overheads

Renting or owning office space is far removed from pocket money change – remote working saves a small fortune in costs relating to heating, phones, electricity, computers and all the other essential components that enable businesses and workers to operate efficiently.

Companies can even use the vacant property footprint to store physical stock or assets to expand on a grander scale with minimal overhead costs.



Technology advancements

The evolution of technology can empower remote working teams with software, such as team messaging tools and seamless video conferencing apps, enabling work colleagues to communicate effectively, similar to in-person interactions.

With its ability to minimise disruption and maintain a sense of 'business as usual', technology knows no bounds and will continue to revolutionise remote working processes and procedures.

Section four

Flexibility

Modern culture highly values the flexibility of remote working, allowing employees to match their work environment to their working style. David Hassell, CEO of [15Five](#), believes that “in any scenario, businesses must strike a balance between location leniency and adherence to established expectations to create an ideal work environment that works for them.”

The likes of manufacturing and construction companies may be unable to physically carry out their duties at home, but remote working practices can still be integrated through measures such as shift swapping and offering staff a choice in their hours.

By giving employees the ability to set a work schedule that works for them, they are more likely to focus on the task at hand and more willing to help their co-workers out.



Environmental benefits

Arguably the biggest beneficiary from this worldwide crisis is the environment. For all the calamity, we will also remember an untainted backdrop of blue skies, rivers running clear and experiencing unprecedented improvements in air quality.

Remote working reduces office waste, fuel consumption and the amount of intensity and damage caused to transportation infrastructure. Giving staff consent to work from home is a simple solution for employers to lower their carbon footprint as well as enhance their environmental credentials.

Here to stay?

When a sense of 'normality' resumes, many employers will be able to assess the impact of remote working on their operations and recognise its worth. It seems inevitable that many will adopt a working from home philosophy once the dust has settled, particularly as it helps enormously with business resiliency in unforeseen circumstances.

Perfectly summarised by Liz Ahmed, the executive vice president of people and communications at [Unum](#), flexible working options "gives people choice in when, where and how they work - and a lot of people value that."



How to keep your teams safe in post-COVID times

This section looks at the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic as the UK Government comes under increasing pressure to review their lockdown rules, particularly in allowing workplaces to reopen.

Undeniably, this global virus has had an unequal impact across the business world, with many companies forced into either implementing remote working practices, functioning at a reduced capacity, or having to shut down their operations completely.

As employers consider the implications of reviving their business, we have provided guidance below into how you can achieve a safe and healthy working environment, once the time is right for you and your team to return to work.

Detailed risk assessment

“Failure to prepare is preparing to fail.”

In preparation for reopening, employers should carry out a methodical risk assessment of the working environment. This can help to identify new threats that have arisen as a result of COVID-19 that could jeopardise the health and safety of employees, customers and other personnel that might enter the workplace, such as cleaners and delivery drivers.

This includes measures to inhibit infection spread and ensuring watertight standards of cleanliness and personal hygiene.

The extent of the possibility of frequent or close contact with other people will vary greatly from business to business. Still, no matter your level of risk, it is imperative that you can demonstrate that you have exhausted every avenue to mitigate the risks of workplace virus transmission.

Regular cleaning strategy

Employers should strongly consider a deep clean and comprehensive disinfectant of the workplace before allowing staff back. As well as eliminating any germs or bacteria, this will also give fantastic peace of mind to your employees.

Once your doors are back open, you will need to execute a strategy that enables enhanced regularity of environmental cleaning and disinfection of common use areas and frequently touched surfaces, objects, etc.

Antiviral cleaning specialist Lisa McQueen has warned that [workplaces and public spaces should be cleaned for three times longer than they normally would](#) during COVID-19 to effectively remove all traces of the deadly respiratory virus.

Promote thorough and consistent hand cleansing by ensuring all team members have access to hand-washing facilities (or hand sanitiser gel).

Social distancing measures

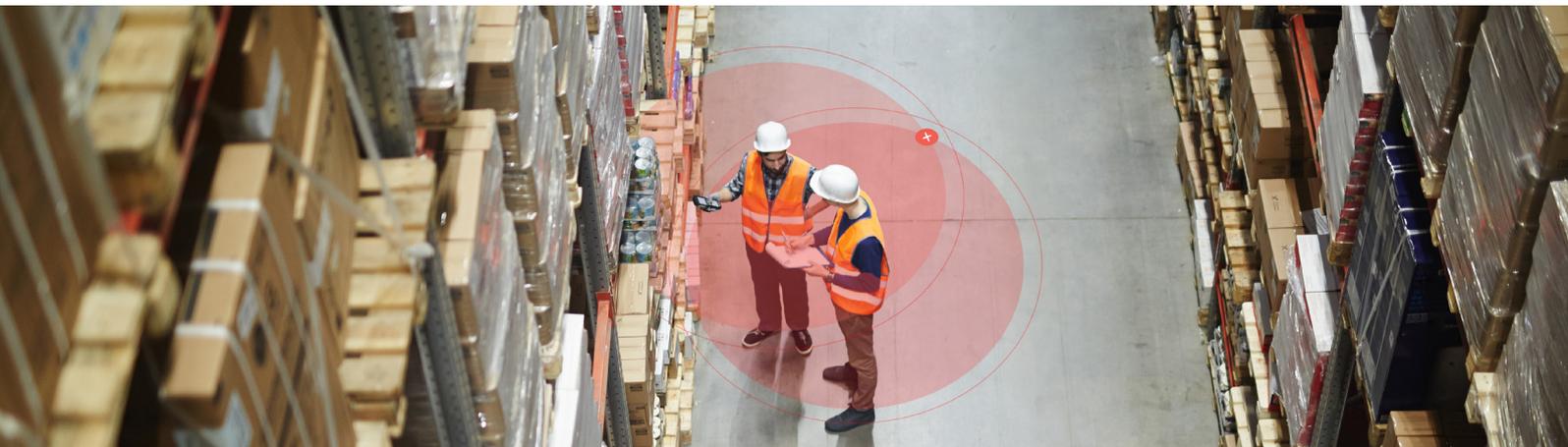
It is conceivable that evidencing a coherent social distancing plan or applying certain social distancing measures may be made a legal requirement.

You will need to review your workplace layout and ascertain the logistics of staff being able to comfortably maintain a safe two-metre physical distance from one another.

Section five

How will you reduce in-person interaction, manage meetings, control communal areas or employees that travel to work together? Social distancing posters or floor graphics provide an effective visual marker for individuals, while other steps could include installing workspace partitions, banning hot-desking or establishing flexible work hours (e.g. staggered shifts) to reduce congestion.

At Tended, we have developed a [safety wearable with built-in social distancing technology](#) to help the likes of construction, manufacturing, infrastructure and logistics companies get back up and running. It features an ultra-wideband proximity sensor and immediately notifies workers if they come within two metres of a colleague.



PPE

Guaranteeing safe working conditions for employees includes providing them with personal protective equipment (PPE), so that they carry out their job safely and without the trepidation of being endangered by hazardous chemicals or harmful respiratory droplets.

From face masks to disposable coveralls and gloves, there is a strong likelihood that the wearing of PPE post-COVID-19 will become mandatory. If your workforce is required to wear gloves/masks, then you will also need to think about training staff on their correct usage – since both can be ineffective if used inappropriately.

Monitoring of employee health

Many workers will be apprehensive about returning to work and the heightened exposure to contamination risk. As an employer, you are encouraged to monitor their mental and physical health regularly and take into account factors such as their age, medical history and their level of vulnerability.

Adopting a flexible and accommodating approach is crucial for a strong employee/ employer relationship during this challenging period. Ben Willmott, Head of Public Policy at the CIPD, highlighted that “the sorts of behaviours that are going to be critically important are exhibiting empathy, listening to staff, and providing support and flexibility.” For example, you could minimise the number of staff using equipment or ask employees to alternate days working at home.

As well as the chaos brought about by the coronavirus, it has perhaps given us a glimpse into the future of work. Right now, we have no idea how the working environment will look when we emerge from the other side. However, if flexible and remote practices stuck around, would that be a bad thing?

