



COVID-19

Opening Safer Public Places Risk Management and Good Practice

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Introduction

During the early part of the pandemic, the Government's clear message was to stay home and stay safe. There was a need to reduce footfall, keep people safe and save lives and many of our public spaces and facilities were closed in line with the new restrictions

On May 10th, 2020 the Government eased a number of the restrictions, allowing people to spend more time outdoors and use public open space. Local councils must now reassess their public spaces and facilities to see whether these can be opened safely.

The guide identifies government guidance and information from national bodies which will help you establish whether you can put in place sufficient measures to ensure that those using them are able to meet the government guidelines on social distance, cleanliness and hygiene (the 3 Covid-19 criteria).

Government Guidance

The Government maintains documents giving guidance on managing the impact of Covid-19 on all aspects of our lives. You should always refer to the most up to date documents maintained on www.gov.uk .

The following documents are important and give detailed information on which facilities can be opened and the safety considerations required for them to be opened appropriately.

The documents are updated regularly in accordance with government announcements and you should check the current version each time you review your services.

1. [Closure of certain businesses and venues in the UK](#)
The list of buildings, businesses and leisure facilities open to the public.
2. [Coronavirus \(COVID-10\): Safer Public Places – Urban Centres and Green Spaces](#)
The management guide for reopening public open space.
3. [Working safely during coronavirus](#)
Health and Safety Executive (HSE) guidance to help employers, employees and the self-employed understand how to work safely during the coronavirus pandemic. Includes 8 themed guides to areas, some of which will be relevant to your council.
4. [Staying safe outside your home](#)
Public Health England have produced this short guide to individuals on staying safe outdoors, and some information for those who provide services on what should be available.

1. The Principles for the management of safe public spaces

The Government has outlined a number of key criteria which underpin any consideration of relaxing the restrictions on public movement and access to open space. Some of these are a matter for individual responsibility and action, but those responsible for public places must be able to put appropriate measures in place meet the guidance and pass the following tests :

- Social distancing – maintaining at least 2m from others both inside and outdoors
- Cleaning – focussing on touch points such as handrails, door handles, gates and shared hard surfaces
- Hygiene and hand washing – ensuring that hand washing facilities are available and that spaces are managed to minimise cross contamination

It is essential that all these tests can be met in order for a facility to be reopened safely. They are the basis for any judgement on whether it is safe to fully or partially reopen a public area. The purpose of this short guide is to outline how to assess whether it is now safe to open a public facility and where to seek advice on the precautions which need to be put in place to do so.

Reopening of public open space

Local councils and land owners must now consider how to manage the reopening of the countryside and the public spaces. The Government's expectation is that some facilities should now reopen provided that they can be managed safely.

Many councils have continued to manage public areas including parks, recreation grounds and cemeteries. In some areas public toilets have also remained open. As owners and/or operators of public spaces, you will be working towards fully reopened public facilities as restrictions are eased, working with your staff and contractors within your communities to do so safely.

Reopening of public buildings and premises

Your council may also be responsible for property and buildings such as toilets, bus shelters, storage facilities, libraries, information centres, office accommodation. As the restrictions are relaxed and people return to normal day to day activities, you will also have to consider how to reopen these buildings safely. In particular social distancing becomes more difficult indoors and you will need to consider whether it is possible to provide the additional measures required.

2. What is a Covid-19 risk assessment and what must we consider?

A Covid-19 Risk assessment is a logical step by step process looking at each individual place/service/activity and identifying who uses them and the risks to these people when they do. It is fundamentally no different in format from the Risk Assessment process that all councils are familiar with, but it focusses on the specific risks arising from the coronavirus pandemic. It allows the council to identify and put in place additional measures so that it can meet the 3 Covid-19 criteria of social distancing, cleanliness and hygiene.

The key principles are :

1. Carry out a separate assessment for every facility/open space to ensure a consistency of approach. Even where you run the same service in a number of places (parks, toilets, footpaths etc) the risks will be different depending on the individual circumstances.
2. Do not use another council's assessment for your public facilities! You can research on line for suggestions of the sorts of risks which may be relevant, but your own documents must be specific to the council's own facilities.
3. Identify the different users who will access the facility including the public, staff, contractors and visitors; you may also need to think about different age groups i.e. parents and children. The toilet cleaner will face different risks in undertaking the work, to those who use the toilets, therefore the risk assessment must look at the needs of everyone who has access to the facility.
4. The assessment must establish what actions could be taken to manage or mitigate the risk in order to meet the 3 Covid-19 criteria. If there are precautions and solutions these must be recorded on the assessment and then be checked regularly.
5. A record of each assessment must be kept together with the rationale for the final decision, review points for the future, inspection timetable and by who.

If you cannot meet the 3 covid-19 tests then the facility must remain closed and reopening kept under review

Where you have a contractor providing services to the council, they must have completed a risk assessment for Covid-19 and have a plan for safe working which meets the 3 Covid-19 criteria. A copy of the assessment and the plan must be held on the council's records and the work monitored.

3. What standards should we use for management of public spaces and public areas?

The Government has published [a suite of guidance papers](#) for all aspects of community life. Each document/guide lists the considerations and the measures which would need to be put in place for the access to be deemed safe.

For many of the council's services, public buildings and open spaces there may be a governing body or membership association which will have produced specialist information on meeting the 3 Covid-19 Criteria.

We would recommend that where appropriate, the council incorporates this information into its the risk assessment. At the end of this guide we have tried to provide a comprehensive list of those bodies and organisations which you may find helpful.

4. Undertaking a Covid-19 risk assessment

The Health and Safety Executive has prepared guidance and templates to help explain risk assessment for Covid-19 which can be accessed via the following links, which you are able to adapt for your council.

[HSE Guide to Risk Assessment](#) - A guide on how to protect people from coronavirus (COVID-19) in your workplace. You should do a risk assessment and manage the risk of coronavirus in your business. This includes taking measures to work at home where possible, maintaining social distancing, cleaning and hygiene.

[Risk Assessment Template](#) – the basic template to use as a format for each location

[Guidance on engaging with staff as part of risk management](#) – when assessing risks to staff and contractors, you will need to consult and involve everyone in the steps you are taking to manage the risk of coronavirus. The HSE guidance is helpful.

5. How to assess risk

The Covid-19 Guide to Safer Public Places gives a full guide on how to assess risks, the steps which can be taken to manage the risks and some suggestions for how these might be implemented. Read in conjunction with the HSE Guide to Working Safely during the Corona Virus, you will be able to identify the risks to your own places and what steps may be possible to allow for safe distancing, cleanliness and hygiene.

For each identified setting, you should :

- a. Identify the hazards
 - Inability to maintain social distancing
 - Shared surfaces
 - Enclosed spaces (without fresh air)
- b. Identify who may be at risk
 - residents of all ages and abilities
 - staff
 - volunteers
 - contractors etc
- c. Record what you have already done to manage the risk
- d. Identify what further actions you can take

Final Question : Can you put in place sufficient safeguards to allow you to meet the social distancing and cleanliness criteria in full?

If the council is still unable to meet the 3 Covid-19 criteria, then the facility must remain closed as it is impossible to meet the national criteria.

6. Measures to address risk

The council will need to consider what it can do to protect each category of person identified in the risk assessment. The [Covid-19 Safer Public Places guide](#) explains the considerations and actions which may help manage the risk.

Potential measures and adjustments could include :

- Requiring staff to work from home where possible
- Introducing a one way system, separate entrances and exits
- Signage
- Defined areas for where people should stand to comply with social distancing
- Reduction of unnecessary obstacles such as gates, planters and barriers.
- Restricted entry
- Provision of PPE
- Varied cleaning routine and frequency of cleaning
- Instructions to staff on travel, cleanliness and use of PPE
- Social distancing of staff on site and in offices
- Staff and member induction and refresher sessions
- Training
- Liaison with contractors to establish common working practices and ensure safe working methods.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has also [guidance](#) on working safely which explains what actions can be taken to manage the risk.

7. Record keeping

It is essential that good records are kept with each risk assessment as these may be needed at a future date. The record should include :

- The location of the risk assessment
- The date that the assessment was carried out and any subsequent review/inspection dates
- Who might be harmed
- What further steps could be taken to control the risk
- Who needs to carry out the action and by when
- Confirmation of the date that the actions were implemented
- Records of inspections and monitoring, with any actions required/taken
- How these were publicised
- How these decisions were communicated to staff
- Any other matters relevant

6. Publicising the council's decisions

As the restrictions are eased, there will be a wide variation in the way in which public facilities and public spaces reopen. It is important that the council communicates the reasons for keeping some places closed or the basis on which they are partially or fully reopened.

Public Information

The Council should publish the risk assessments on its website together with a summary/decision notice which includes :

- The measures put in place to allow a site to fully or partially reopen
- The reasons why the site cannot reopen
- The timetable for reviewing any decision
- A contact number for questions or reporting any issues with the site.

Staff and Contractors

Staff and contractors may be fearful of returning to work especially if they are in a vulnerable category or caring for someone in a vulnerable category. Employers should be prepared to support staff as they return to work and provide additional equipment, PPE and training as required.

It is important that the risk assessment process is undertaken with staff and that the results are shared with them as part of a dialogue about changes to their working practices and conditions. The Council has a duty of care to protect its staff and employees must feel confident that their needs have been addressed as part of the risk assessment. Councils should keep a record of these discussions and ensure that it has responded to requests from staff.

INSERT NAME OF PARISH/TOWN COUNCIL

COVID-19 RISK ASSESSMENT

DECISION NOTICE

Site Name and Address :

Date of Risk Assessment :

Date of Decision :

The Council has undertaken a Covid-19 risk assessment to identify whether sufficient measures can be put in place to allow the [INSERT NAME OF FACILITY] to be open to the public. We have considered the requirements for Social Distancing, Cleaning and hygiene as part of this assessment, using government requirements in place at the time.

DECISION : That the [INSERT NAME OF FACILITY] is opened / remains closed to the public for the following reasons

REASON FOR DECISION :

Signed :

This decision will be reviewed on :

