

The background of the cover is a photograph of a modern office interior. It shows a large, open-plan space with glass-walled meeting rooms and office desks. The floor is made of light-colored wood. The ceiling has recessed lighting. The overall atmosphere is clean, bright, and professional.

# **CIBSE COVID-19 EMERGING FROM LOCKDOWN SAFELY RE-OCCUPYING BUILDINGS**

**Version 2  
12 May 2020**

## Emerging from lockdown – safely re-occupying buildings

As businesses start to consider bringing staff back into work premises, a number of issues need to be considered for the safety of everyone entering buildings. Government guidelines should be followed (see government websites for the most up to date information).

On 11 May government produced [guidance](#) for employers, employees and the self employed to help them to understand how they can work safely during the pandemic.

This CIBSE advice is intended to give business owners and managers an outline of the main areas that need to be considered concerning both safe working practices and the assessment of building services.

The government guidance reminds employers of their legal responsibility for the safety of those entering workplaces:

*“To help you decide which actions to take, you need to carry out an appropriate COVID-19 risk assessment, just as you would for other health and safety related hazards. This risk assessment must be done in consultation with unions or workers.”*

Undertaking that risk assessment may require advice from competent persons, such as professionally registered engineers who are Chartered or Incorporated engineers registered with the Engineering Council.

© May 2020 The Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers London

Registered charity number 278104

This document is based on the best knowledge available at the time of publication. Due to the rapidly evolving nature of the COVID-19 epidemic this guidance should be read in conjunction with the relevant government guidance, in particular that relating to [“Working safely during coronavirus \(COVID-19\)”](#)

No responsibility of any kind for any injury, death, loss, damage or delay however caused resulting from the use of these recommendations can be accepted by the Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers, the authors or others involved in its publication. In adopting these recommendations for use each adopter by doing so agrees to accept full responsibility for any personal injury, death, loss, damage or delay arising out of or in connection with their use by or on behalf of such adopter irrespective of the cause or reason therefore and agrees to defend, indemnify and hold harmless the Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers, the authors and others involved in their publication from any and all liability arising out of or in connection with such use as aforesaid and irrespective of any negligence on the part of those indemnified.

## Emerging from lockdown – safely re-occupying buildings

As businesses start to consider bringing staff back into work premises, a number of issues need to be considered for the safety of everyone entering the building. Government guidelines should be followed (see government websites for the most up to date information). This brief document is intended to give business owners and managers an outline of the main areas that need to be considered concerning both safe working practices and the assessment of building services.

### Management considerations

1. Management of the organisation which occupies the building needs to plan a timeline and scope of work required before a building that has been vacated for weeks or months can be safely re-occupied. This should take into account new working practices needed to accommodate specific guidance on minimising the risk of viral transmission. The planning must include all necessary risk assessments and method statements which should be completed and recorded.
2. Where a building has multiple occupiers, the organisation which operates and manages the building will need to hold detailed discussions with the occupiers to find out what their own plans are with regard to re-occupying their working space.
3. The timeline and scale or extent of re-occupation of a building should be aligned to Government advice.
4. Any activity carried out in a commercial building requires someone to work, so must be planned and managed in full compliance with the Health and Safety at Work etc Act. Tasks which were previously considered low risk, with straightforward methods of working, may now present new risks and new ways of completing tasks may need to be planned.
5. Ideally a single person will be responsible for reviewing the activity that the occupiers plan to carry out within the building and consider the impact this will have on the usability of the building and its building services. All decisions should be recorded.
6. This person must identify which activities may involve additional health risks in the current circumstances and establish how to avoid such risks if possible – or else to minimise them.
7. Management will need to take care that all activities carried out to prepare a building for re-occupation are risk assessed and carried out following a safe method of working. Other guidance may apply to many aspects of the work required, although this is developing and emerging quickly. Where possible relevant guidance is referenced.
8. It is highly likely that a pre-occupancy inspection will be needed in order to inform and define the extent, timing and order of maintenance and cleaning activities and new cleaning regimes which will need to be put in place.
9. Maintenance and cleaning teams will need training on good hygiene practice, to establish activity schedules and to explain the availability and requirements relating to PPE. It is likely that increased supervision and checking of cleaning work may be needed to build staff confidence, including providing obvious evidence that regular cleaning has taken place
10. An enhanced cleaning regime may be needed, especially where workspaces may need to be used by more than one person during the day, and in “common areas” or for commonly touched surfaces such as door handles, with more frequent, thorough cleaning following.
11. Building managers and occupiers need to consider who will be asked to return to work, activities to be undertaken, working hours, travel plans and the intended occupancy density.

All of these need to be established in order to understand the requirements on building systems, including the supply of domestic hot water, life safety systems and provision of appropriate ventilation rates, as well as entry and exit plans.

12. When considering occupancy levels and working hours building operators need to address:
  - Social distancing requirements within the workplace;
  - Constraints on the travel time of employees, especially in areas where staff use public transport and current guidance is to avoid public transport during peak hours
  - Space availability and working routines, including flexible or “staggered” working;
13. Changes to welfare facilities and equipment usage may be needed to reduce the risks of transmission of infection. All of these factors will influence decisions about levels of occupancy and times of operation. These decisions should be recorded.
14. In the light of the intended occupancy and working hours, other points which building managers will need to consider include:
  - Provision of high levels of ventilation in all occupied areas of the building. To minimise the risk of airborne transmission it is important to maintain higher ventilation rates and to consider increasing ventilation rates in toilets and circulation spaces such as stairwells.
  - Where natural ventilation is used, the dampers and/or windows should be opened, however being mindful of comfort factors.
  - Building entrance and exit protocols and the use of technology, including possible temperature and visitor screening.
  - Lift control programmes may need to be reviewed in order to support reduced occupancy of lift cars.
  - Meeting areas may need to adopt restricted numbers in each meeting space, with clear notices on the assessed safe occupancy and changes to furniture where appropriate to support the revised occupancy levels.
  - Furniture plans should be provided to enable users and cleaning staff to return furniture to agreed positions after a meeting or at the end of a working day, although moving the furniture should be discouraged.
15. Managers and occupying businesses must establish how to respond to local outbreaks in any area of the building, having full regard to the relevant advice from government on this.

## Building systems

The following building systems are covered by statutory requirements and building operators will need to satisfy at least themselves, and possibly insurers, regulators and enforcement bodies, that these have been maintained or brought back up to date prior to the re-occupation of a building. Where regular statutory maintenance or testing was due to take place during the closure and has not been undertaken then it must be carried out before the building is occupied.

- a. **Water systems:** risk assessment and hygiene requirements are covered by HSE ACOP L8 and by the CIC CIPHE guidance<sup>1</sup> to which Society of Public Health Engineers and CIBSE members contributed. This includes the requirement for flushing of all outlets.

---

<sup>1</sup> The CIC CIPHE guidance is due to be published shortly as a risk management briefing

Cooling towers must comply with HSE ACOP L8 and will need competent maintenance and cleaning. CIBSE TM13 gives guidance on minimising risks of legionella.

- b. Electrical safety checks** are required under the Electricity at Work Regulations 1989 & BS7671 (18th edition electrical regulations). A competent electrical contractor should be consulted about any requirements to restart electrical systems and the Electrical Contractors Association provides [guidance](#).
- c. Gas safety inspections** and maintenance are still a statutory requirement and have not been suspended due to the coronavirus. The [Gas Safe register](#) provides guidance. It may be practical to isolate gas supplies in the first instance.
- d. Emergency systems**  
Fire detection system testing and maintenance must be brought up to date. Active fire protection systems such as sprinklers, fire suppression and smoke control systems, fire extinguishers etc. should have up to date maintenance and inspections.
- e. Emergency exits and Means of escape**  
Fire doors and emergency exit routes should be checked for obstruction during the lockdown period and that closing or opening mechanisms are still operating correctly. Any changes to escape routes or assembly points may need signage to be changed.
- f. Emergency lighting**  
Emergency lighting systems must be tested and demonstrated to work fully and effectively and batteries checked by conducting a full 3 hour test. BS5266-1 *Emergency lighting* and BS EN 50172 *Escape Lighting* apply, along with Society of Light and Lighting Guidance in Lighting Guide 12 on Emergency Lighting.
- g. Lifts and escalators**  
Passenger lifts and lifting equipment must comply with the Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations 1998 (LOLER) requirements. The maintenance contractor should confirm that the lifts are compliant and fit for service, although their use should be discouraged wherever possible. [Further guidance is available from CIBSE](#).
- h. Ventilation systems**  
Adequate ventilation is required in all occupied areas. Ventilation rates should not be reduced in line with reduced occupancy but maintained to mitigate any risk of airborne transmission. [Further detailed advice on ventilation is available from CIBSE](#).
- i. Heating systems**  
Where heating systems have been isolated, annual pre-heating season service checks should be undertaken prior to restarting the system.
- j. BMS systems**  
BMS systems should be checked to ensure that operation is as expected, and any changes regarding ventilation rates, building opening times, etc. are implemented. Plant operating times may need to be extended to accommodate changes to working hours and patterns.
- k. Access control & Security systems**  
These may need to be reviewed to ensure operation is still as expected, or for isolation of certain areas of the building. Timings to operation or occupancy may need to be incorporated into the control system to accommodate staggered or shift working.

**l. Portable appliances**

Simple user checks should be sufficient to establish the safety of portable appliances such as kettles, microwaves etc, where an existing portable appliance testing (PAT) system regime is in place. However, use of such appliances should be carefully considered as they present a potential risk of transmission via surface contact.

**m. Specialist services**

Where appropriate, expert advice should be sought in relation to specialist services such as generators, UPS systems, catering equipment, process cooling, fume extract systems etc.

## **Further Guidance**

This is a very short summary of the major issues to be considered in bringing buildings back into regular use. Further guidance is available from [CIBSE](#).

Competent building services engineers will be conversant with this guidance and have access to any of the guidance that is relevant to a particular site or building.