



Working from Home during COVID-19

Guidance for Managers and Employees

NOV 2020

Background

Since the Northern Ireland Executive announcement in March 2020 advising employers to make every effort to help people to work from home where possible, the Trust has supported some staff to work fully or partly from home, where there is no impact on service delivery.

The Trust has had a Homeworking Policy in place for some years, however it was written specifically at a time to cover staff who may require to work from home on a pre-planned longer term basis. On review, it would not appear to be practical or appropriate to fully use the Homeworking Policy for the purposes of homeworking during the pandemic and the uncertain times still facing us.

This document aims to provide interim guidance to both managers and staff as we continue to work hard to keep our staff safe and minimise the risk of the spread of COVID-19. This guidance will be reviewed at regular intervals and as government and Public Health Advice is updated.

Purpose

We are making every effort to support staff's physical and mental wellbeing, to enable staff to stay healthy and protect themselves, colleagues, patients and families as we continue to deliver services.

The requirement to ensure robust social distancing in the workplace has meant that accommodation availability continues to be substantially reduced. Teams continue to think innovatively about accommodation solutions, and what may work best for each team.

This guidance looks at how to make home working work for the individual, the team and the Trust during the coming months.

Who can work from home?

Wherever operationally possible, and where service provision is not negatively impacted, managers should facilitate staff to work from home, in line with government advice.

Any requests that are approved will be subject to review, should the priorities of the service or Trust change.

Employees approved to work from home may still be required to attend the workplace at short notice to support service delivery.

Should a member of staff wish to work from home on a longer term basis, an application should be made under the Trust's Homeworking Policy upon conclusion of the pandemic.

Resources for Homeworking

There are three types of remote access:

1. Email and office applications using Microsoft Office 365. This is available to every member of staff and does not require Trust owned equipment. This could be a phone (Apple or Android), tablet (Apple, Android or Microsoft), laptop (Windows or Mac) or home PC (Windows or Mac). This will allow staff to use all the features of email that would be available to them at work. There is no capacity limit in regards to the number of users at any one time.
2. Trust owned laptops. This will allow access to Office applications (including email) and most of the clinical and admin apps (except HRPTS and FPL). It should be noted that if a Trust laptop has not been logged into via the Trust network over the past few months then the necessary updates have not been applied and many of these will not work correctly until they have been updated by IT. There is currently a backlog of these requests following the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently there is a limit to the number of users who can be online at any one time.

3. Remote Desktop or Citrix. This will allow the staff member access to their full desktop and the majority of clinical and administrative applications. This can be run on almost any client (Microsoft, Mac and tablet). It will require either a Trust or personally owned phone for authentication. Note please do not use the default Safari web browser on Macs or iOS as this is known to cause technical connection problems. Currently there is a limit to the number of users who can be online at any one time.

IT have designed a support site to assist homeworking during the Covid 19 pandemic. The site contains a range of how to guides, tutorials, tips and training resources for staff on various applications. Click [here](#) to access the site.

Advice for employees

- Have a conversation with your manager to discuss practical, performance and managerial arrangements.
- Undertake the Homeworking Environment Risk Assessment and Action Plan (Appendix 1) with your manager.
- Complete the [DSE Awareness E-learning Training](#)
- Have a regular eye sight / eye screening test. Click [here](#) to access the Procedure for the Management of the Display Screen Equipment.
- Supply a contact telephone number to your manager and agree with them the hours when you are available for contact by phone and / or email.
- Keep in regular contact with your team colleagues. [Microsoft Teams](#) allows staff to collaborate, share content and have virtual meetings and huddles.
- Inform your manager immediately if you do not have access to broadband in order to agree workarounds / other duties.
- Adhere to the Trust's Data Protection and Information Governance policies and procedures (available on the Intranet). Click [here](#) for Information Governance FAQs during Covid 19.
- Ensure all Trust equipment and documentation are used, stored, transported and disposed of correctly and appropriately at all times.

- Take note that internet services and utility bills will not normally be paid for or reimbursed. Call costs will only be reimbursed in exceptional circumstances and only when the costs to be incurred have been agreed in advance with line managers. You may however be able to claim tax relief for additional household costs – click [here](#) to check online.
- Assess the personal implications of home working with respect to household insurance.
- Comply with absence reporting procedures in line with the Managing Attendance Policy.
- New and expectant mothers should refer to any additional health and safety guidance contained in the [Trust's New & Expectant Mothers Policy](#).

Advice for employees- hints and tips for staying well while working from home

Health and Wellbeing

If you are not used to working from home, it can take a bit of adjustment especially in these current circumstances. To ease your transition into remote working, this [guide](#) provides some things you might wish to consider, ensuring you look after your health and wellbeing and to help make home working a positive experience for both you and your manager.

Please take a look at some of the [wellbeing resources](#) available to our staff, helping you to look after your mental and physical wellbeing during COVID-19.

Health and Safety Considerations

You should ensure that your home environment is suitable for home working and that you take care when using your IT equipment, so that it does not cause or exacerbate Musculoskeletal (MSK) conditions. See Appendix 2 for further guidance.

Advice for Managers

- Managers should consider and prioritise which staff are able to work from home, ensuring appropriate workforce planning. This will be in accordance with government guidelines and with the duties that can be performed at home or remotely. Work with your team to consider new ways of working and staff preferences. There may be some individuals whose preference is not to work from home due to a variety of reasons such as having no suitable workspace, a distracting environment, or working styles. In such cases these individuals may helpfully support duties which can only be completed from the workplace.
- Accepting that we have a number of teams with roles which require staff to have an on-site presence, consideration could be given to allowing staff to work from home on a rotational basis or to 'cohort' staff. Teams will need to give careful consideration to work that can be done remotely and work which needs to be completed on site. This can be linked to considerations around workspace configurations, and the rotation of staff based upon individual working patterns, to support social distancing.
- Managers are encouraged to be flexible about when the work is done with the potential to support some duties being completed outside of normal working hours. This may enable employees to undertake both work and caring commitments, as well as supporting personal circumstances and preferences. Note where staff have requested to work in what would normally be deemed to be unsocial hours this will not attract any form of pay enhancement.
- Managers should keep in regular contact with their remote team.
- Managers should agree with the employees how work will be delegated and monitored.
- Managers should consider whether the employee holds the required skillset to work independently, ensuring appropriate arrangements are in place for mentoring, training and development, clear communication and on-going support from the team.
- Managers should also ensure that any agreements for staff to work from home are regularly reviewed, and in accordance with the latest guidance, service, team and personal needs.

- The Trust has the same health and safety responsibilities for those colleagues working from home as for any other colleagues. Managers should review all Homeworking Environment Risk Assessments and agree any issues from the associated Action Plan. If possible, enable individuals to take home specialised DSE equipment such as keyboards, mouse, riser etc.
- For employees who are self-isolating but are fit to work, managers should consider what tasks staff can do at home or remotely.
- The requirement to access confidential and personally identifiable records could restrict opportunity for home working. Managers need to remind employees of the Data Protection and Information Governance policies and procedures.
- Stay up to date with IT support, solutions and guidelines for staff by following this [link](#).

Advice for Managers- hints and tips for managing home and remote workers

There are some key ingredients for managing productive homeworking:

- *Building trust with staff who work from home* - there should be a healthy relationship of trust and confidence between the homeworker and manager.
- *Agreeing how work performance will be supervised and measured* - performance should be assessed on the results produced and the quality of the work, or with agreed work objectives being achieved.
- *Communicating effectively* - Keep in touch using as many different media as possible. Check in regularly with employees to support progress, provide feedback, and ensure the individual's wellbeing. Provide opportunities for them to join meetings and team meetings virtually. Keep employees up to date. Ensure there is an effective process for 2 way communication, to enable all staff to feel comfortable in providing feedback and putting forward ideas for continuous improvement.
- *Health and Wellbeing* - Continue to consider the team's health, wellbeing and safety. Ensure staff continue to feel a sense of team, regardless of their working location.

- *Training and development* - support the individual to continue to complete training, development, and mentoring where possible.
- *Be flexible*- create a supportive environment, empowering staff to work in the most productive way for them and the team.

Further tips on managing remote teams can be found [here](#).

Remember, we're in this together

This is a new and ever changing situation. Even if you've worked from home before, it'll be a new experience for lots of people. So be mindful of that. It's important to stay united. Share stories, communicate well, and be prepared to accept some process changes.

Additional guidance and support is available via:

- AskHRCOVID19@belfasttrust.hscni.net
- ICT Department Remote Working Helpline: 0800 587 3878

Homeworking Environment Risk Assessment

Purpose:

- To support staff wellbeing during COVID-19 by ensuring that the homeworking environment is as safe as possible;
- To establish if further action is required to provide a suitable and safe homeworking environment.

(To be completed by the homeworker and discussed with Line Manager)

Employee Name:

Department:

Base:

Date of Assessment:

Brief description of type of work undertaken at home:

Detail of working hours/worked from home:

No.	Questions	Yes	No
1.	Is the workstation positioned to avoid the use of extension leads and adaptors?		
2.	Is the heating, lighting and ventilation in the work area adequate?		
3.	Is the room or work area free from tripping hazards?		
4.	Is the chair stable and comfortable?		
5.	Have you completed <u>DSE (Display Screen Equipment) Awareness e-learning training</u> ?		
6.	In relation to the display screen equipment workstation:		
6a.	Has the workstation been positioned to avoid glare and reflection on the screen?		
6b.	Is the screen at the correct height and position in relation to the user?		
6c.	Are the forearms roughly horizontal and the wrists straight whilst using the keyboard?		
6d.	Is there space in front of the keyboard to rest the wrists when not actively keying?		
6e.	Are the feet resting comfortably on the floor? If no is a foot rest required?		
6f.	Are the characters on the monitor easy to read? Has the brightness and contrast been properly adjusted?		
6g.	Are frequently used items within easy reach?		
6h.	Is the mouse positioned close to and at about the same level as the keyboard?		
7a.	Do you know what to do in an emergency, have you worked out an evacuation plan so you and anyone else in the house knows what to do and where to go in case of a fire?		

7b.	Are smoke detector/s fitted and tested?		
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Signature of staff member:

Date:

Signature of line manager:

Date:

Action Plan

Employee name:

Issues requiring action	Remedial Action required/ agreed	Action by (Whom)	Timescale	Date action completed

NOTE: Report any changes to the above information to your manager as well as informing them if there has been any changes to your living arrangements or changes to your health etc

Signature of staff member:

Date:

Signature of line manager:

Date:

HOMEWORKING TIPS & ADVICE

**FOR SOME OF US OUR HOMES ARE NOW OUR WORKPLACE
REMEMBER WE STILL HAVE THE SAME RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR OWN HEALTH AND SAFETY!**

These are extra-ordinary times with many of us working from home, at short notice, having had little time to prepare. There is also uncertainty about how long it will last, so let's look at some important issues.

- 1. WORKSTATIONS:** This one affects us all and is a 'high frequency/low impact' risk (whilst it's happening all the time any potential injuries are unlikely to be too serious).



This picture summarises the recommended set up for a workstation and this is what we should try and replicate in our homes.

However, many will not have chairs, monitors, desks, etc. and if you only have a laptop it's challenging to fully achieve both the right 'screen height' and 'horizontal arms'!

As such we need to apply our innovation value and improvise to help reduce risk as best we can.

Below are some points to consider.....

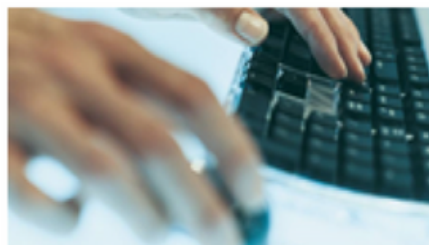
The single most effective thing you can do is take regular breaks! You should aim to take a 10-minute break in every hour. Stand up and walk. Go into your garden/another room; walk up and down the stairs; do some stretching, etc. Ensure you take a lunch break of at least 30 minutes AWAY from your laptop.

DO:

- Use the best chair you can find i.e. one with a backrest and armrests if possible.
- Select the most suitable worktop you have i.e. solid and best height for your size/legs.
- Eliminate glare where possible i.e. move the table, close blinds, etc.
- If you have a separate monitor or keyboard then use them – this will allow you to get the right balance between arm and eye levels.
- Make sure your immediate work area is clear of clutter, both on the 'desk' around your laptop, and under your 'desk' so your feet aren't obstructed.
- Position your laptop so your forearms can rest on the work surface to give you support.
- Look at making small changes to your workstation each day i.e. changes that will make you change your position, albeit only slightly. It is constant positions/repetitive actions that are most likely to result in discomfort/strains.
- Drink plenty of water – hydration is essential!

DO NOT:

- Work from your bed, or even your bedroom if possible.
- Work sitting on the sofa with your laptop on your knees, or any similar position.
- Spend the time you have away from your laptops on your phone or tablet!



Whilst ensuring you comply with government/public health guidance try and get out, get some fresh air, and do some exercise every day. If you can't get out set yourself an exercise routine indoors. Keep mobile!

HOMEWORKING TIPS & ADVICE

2. FIRE SAFETY: This also affects us all, but is easily overlooked, including the impacts of everyone being at home 24/7, and is a 'low frequency/high impact' risk (thankfully fire don't happen too often, but when they do they have the potential to be fatal!).

Ensure all your smoke detectors are working and you have spare batteries. If you don't have smoke detectors then GO AND GET SOME! Hardware stores are still open – they're reasonably cheap and easy to fit.

HAVE AN ESCAPE PLAN

- The best escape route is often the normal way in and out of your house.
- Think about any problems you may have using it i.e. at night would you need a torch (if a fire starts from an electrical fault you may have no power)?
- Could the escape route be blocked at anytime i.e. do people put their bikes in the hallway? How can you keep it clear?
- Think about a secondary escape route. A back door, a window, etc. ensuring you can then get out of where it leads you!
- If there are older, less mobile and/or disabled people in the house think about how they will get out.

DOOR/WINDOW KEYS

Decide where you will keep door and window keys, always keep them there, and ensure everyone knows where they are!

PRACTICE YOUR ESCAPE PLAN

Practice it with everyone who lives in the house – ensure everyone knows it!

IDENTIFY A SAFE PLACE

Think about a room you could use if you couldn't get out.

- Choose a room with a window that opens so you can call for help, possibly escape from.
- Have towels, etc. available that you can use to seal the door.
- Take your mobile with you – dial 999 immediately.

QUICK BEDTIME CHECKLIST

- Check your cooker is off.
- Switch off and unplug all non-essential electrical appliances.
- Ensure any candles, cigarettes, fires, etc. are fully extinguished.
- Turn any portable electrical/gas heaters off.
- Ensure emergency exits are clear and keys are where they should be.
- Close all internal doors to help prevent any fire spread.

Don't leave candles unattended! Don't overload electrical sockets!

3. TIPS FOR EMPLOYEES WORKING AT HOME: While you may not have to travel to get to work that day, it is still important to keep to a 'work day ritual'. Some tips for working at home include:

- Have a specific location where you work. This may be a room, or area, but it is always the place where you do your work. Avoid your bed, sofa etc.
- Begin and finish at the same time every day you are working at home, avoid sleeping late.
- Have a beginning and end of day ritual. Since there is no longer a 'break' between waking up and going to work, some people find it helpful to actually leave the house and take a walk outside before starting work (all staff to follow government guidance on social distancing, i.e. only go outside for food, health reasons or work [if you are not working from home]). If you go out, stay 2 metres (6ft) away from other people at all times. Wash your hands as soon as you get home. Do not meet others, even friends and family).
- As you would for working in the office, set a schedule and stick to it. Make a 'to do' list and check your accomplishments at the end of the day. Stick to deadlines.
- Pace yourself, don't burn out and on the other hand don't develop bad habits by not doing the same amount of work as before.
- Get changed out of your night time clothes, wear 'work type clothes' if it makes you feel more productive.
- Avoid excessive snacking.
- Maintain regular contact with the Trust. Establish a routine for contact with management / co-workers etc. Keep your manager informed of your progress and any difficulties encountered.
- Arrange / participate in team video / conference calls regularly to ensure everyone remains 'connected' and up to date.
- Determine what interruptions are okay and what is not. Tell your family what the ground rules are etc.
- Don't let the radio / TV distract you.

Follow existing Information Governance and ICT Policies and Procedures