



# GUIDANCE Note

**DRAFT: COVID-19 and Engineering Services: guidance (GN 2)**

<b>Title</b>	<b>Working in close proximity</b>
<b>Purpose</b>	Template indicating measures that enable work to be carried out closer than the PHE social distancing (2 metre) guidelines

Employers operating on-site (construction, maintenance or emergency call-out) during the Covid-19 (coronavirus) pandemic must ensure they are protecting their workforce and controlling the potential spread of infection.

The position of the Construction Leadership Council (CLC) is that work on-site (and travel to and from site) should *only continue* if:

- it can be carried out in line with the guidance issued by Public Health England (PHE);
- it can be undertaken without compromising safety and health;
- it is done in accordance with the latest CLC Site Operating Procedure (SOP); and
- workers can travel safely and responsibly to sites.

The *two most effective ways to prevent the spread of coronavirus* on site and when travelling are:

- social distancing and
- effective hand washing, along with thorough cleaning of all contactable surfaces and equipment (see the PHE guidelines and CLC SOP) – plus preventing unnecessary sharing of items or equipment.

All activities need to be planned and organised to **avoid all unnecessary close proximity between workers and others**, to minimise the risk of spread of infection, and no work should be carried out that requires skin to skin contact.

## 1. Eliminate close working if possible

Firstly, seek to *eliminate the need for any type of close proximity working* by e.g.

- Rearranging tasks to enable them to be done by one person, or by maintaining social distancing measures (2 metres)

- Considering mechanical aids to reduce worker interface and proximity

## 2. Where closer proximity working is necessary and unavoidable

In line with the CLC SOP and government guidelines, where it is *not possible* to follow social distancing guidelines in full for a particular activity, then:

1. “consider whether that activity needs to continue for the site (or essential installation/maintenance activity) to continue to operate.” If this is so;
2. “take all mitigating actions possible” (applying the hierarchy of measures below) to reduce the risk of transmission between workers and others.
  - Comprehensive hygiene measures must apply at all times (PHE guidelines and CLC SOP)
  - Increase fresh air ventilation in any enclosed spaces.

To enable the necessary mitigating actions, conduct a *risk assessment* and introduce preventative measures and a safe system of work (method statement), applying the hierarchy of controls below (CLC SOP). This may include a permit to work or other authorisation system.

### **Reduce**

Where social distancing measures (minimum 2 metres) cannot be applied:

- Minimise the frequency and time workers are within 2 metres of each other
- Minimise the number of workers involved in the task
- Workers should work side by side, or facing away from each other - avoid working face to face wherever possible

### **Isolate**

If workers must work within 2 metres of each other, keep the team:

- Together (do not change workers within teams) – known as ‘cohorting’
- As small as possible
- Away from other workers or others, where possible

### **Control**

Avoid *face to face* working wherever possible. But if face to face working is essential to carrying out a task when working within 2 metres:

- Keep such work to under 15 minutes *and as short a time as possible*
- Consider using a permit or other authorisation process for close proximity activities
- Provide designated supervision to monitor and manage compliance with your close proximity preventative measures.

## **PPE (including RPE)**

For typical construction and maintenance activity, there is no PHE reference to using RPE as a protective measure against the spread of coronavirus (except for 'specific environments'). However, following a *suitable and sufficient risk assessment*, RPE may be selected for close proximity work:

- 1) as part of "all mitigating actions possible" (CLC SOP) and/or
- 2) in response to any client or main contractor requirements.

Note: PPE/RPE is last in the hierarchy of protection against *any airborne hazard* (including coronavirus) because:

- wearing PPE/RPE – even if it has the *potential* to confer extra protection - may lead to unwanted changes in worker behaviour which undermine available social distancing and good hygiene practices – the two most effective control measures against viral spread
- RPE must *face fit properly* to provide the necessary protection – 'face fit testing' is required for half masks, plus 'fit checking' before work starts
- RPE mask protection can deteriorate during use
- donning and doffing RPE, and single use PPE waste disposal, must be carried out properly to reduce the risk of viral contamination and spread
- face masks do not protect the eyes.

### RPE in 'specific environments' (elevated risk of viral spread)

The CLC SOP says that where personnel are required to work in specific environments (which may present *elevated risk* of viral spread) e.g.:

- where persons are shielding, or with COVID-19 symptoms; or
- confirmed Covid-19 cases may be present

additional PPE (which may include RPE) *should be considered*, specific to the coronavirus risk. See the ECA/BESA GN 1 guide on working in 'Specific Environments'.

Examples of specific environments might be health or care home settings, or some domestic settings.

Eye protection (any grade) will protect the eyes, while face shields will protect the *face and eyes*. Face shields may also lower viral *exhalation* risk but may not offer significant respiratory protection. Subject to risk assessment, face shields may negate the need for light eye protection.

FFP3 and other face masks are primarily designed to protect against workplace respiratory health hazards, such as dust or asbestos (that is, beyond coronavirus). They must be deployed to protect against any significant respiratory hazard, in addition to any consideration as a possible coronavirus "mitigating action". Note that 'valved' face masks present a potential viral *exhalation* risk compared to non-valved masks.

Surgical masks are primarily designed to help prevent the spread of airborne coronavirus droplets. They do not protect against other workplace respiratory hazards. PHE does not refer to deploying surgical masks in typical onsite situations to control the spread of coronavirus, but they may be a suitable "mitigating action" in specific environments, where there are *no other significant respiratory hazards*.

Higher-protection types of RPE such as positive air pressure respirators, can offer effective onsite coronavirus respiratory and face protection, if necessary, provided they have effective air filters.

### Site requirements to wear RPE

Any overarching (e.g. site owner) requirement to wear PPE (including RPE) with a view to controlling the risk from coronavirus should be dealt with in discussion with the site owner and/or main contractor.

### 3. Key sources of official information and advice

- [www.gov.uk/guidance/social-distancing-in-the-workplace-during-coronavirus-covid-19-sector-guidance#construction](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/social-distancing-in-the-workplace-during-coronavirus-covid-19-sector-guidance#construction)
- [www.gov.uk/guidance/social-distancing-in-the-workplace-during-coronavirus-covid-19-sector-guidance#transport-businesses](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/social-distancing-in-the-workplace-during-coronavirus-covid-19-sector-guidance#transport-businesses)
- CLC Site operating Procedures at: [www.constructionleadershipcouncil.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Site-Operating-Procedures-Version-3.pdf](http://www.constructionleadershipcouncil.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Site-Operating-Procedures-Version-3.pdf)
- For more information on face fit testing RPE: [www.hse.gov.uk/respiratory-protective-equipment/fit-testing-basics.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/respiratory-protective-equipment/fit-testing-basics.htm)
- See also for Wales: <https://gov.wales/taking-all-reasonable-measures-maintain-physical-distancing-workplace>

#### Important note:

This guidance note (GN 2) has been drawn up by **the BESA and ECA** to help contractors working in the engineering services sector to work in closer proximity than the PHE general guidelines of 2m, where this activity is essential and unavoidable.

This information provides guidance only – it must be adapted as necessary to fit the prevailing site and other circumstances and based on a suitable and sufficient risk assessment. The ECA and BESA can provide further supporting information for Members on conducting suitable and sufficient risk assessments.

Comments on this GN are welcome, and should be directed to either:

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