

Covid-19 Risk assessments and the use of PPE at work.

Summary

Plumbers and Heating Engineers can work in many locations and types of buildings in a single day, inside or outside. Therefore, planning how to work (either alone or with others) requires time to stop and think.

Employers have a legal responsibility to protect employees and others, the same applies as a sole trader. Involving others in the decision making process around safety will help to create a culture of safety in which everyone has participated, and therefore becomes the new agreed standard operating procedure. It will also mean that employees are more likely to do it for themselves on the occasions they are working independently.

It goes without saying that if anyone is displaying any Covid-19 symptoms or has any reason to suspect they may have contracted the virus, they should self-isolate and not venture out.

The first thing to do before entering a property is to undertake a risk assessment with particular emphasis on Covid-19 requirements. See the following link:

- [Covid-19 personal protective equipment \(PPE\)](#)

Overalls

PPE is nothing new to the industry, but I think most will agree that the use of overalls isn't seen as much today as t-shirts and jeans!

Overalls are a method of changing from dirty or stained clothes into the clothes underneath that have been protected. This is a basic method of stopping the transfer of contaminants from one site and person to another, but it is not always seen today. Let's be honest, changing clothes between jobs is an inconvenience that consumes time and money so the temptation is to skip it. However, we should all accept the need to take responsibility for our own working practices and be prepared to change hygiene practices for the better.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Of course, it goes without saying that we should keep two-metres apart and wash our hands regularly, but how are these rules kept to when working in a more restricted space like a domestic property, removing large radiators as an example?

We have to risk assess when to use PPE, which PPE is appropriate and how often it ought to be used. The decisions around this are paramount for personal safety and the safety of others.

A sample, not exhaustive, list of items potentially appropriate for consideration and use is listed below.

1. If using a **face covering** - change at least daily, change if it gets damp, and change if you've touched it (and wash your hands thereafter). Only use at one site
2. **Face shield** – considered to reduce wearer's risk but not others
3. **Respirator (RPE)** – must be fitted correctly, one size does not fit all
4. **Dust mask** – these are not designed for medical use and are therefore not suitable as Covid-19 protection although there are professional reasons for wearing
5. **Snood** – a cloth type covering, but must be washed each day.
6. **Disposable gloves** – use once, reduces transmission
7. **Disposable overalls** - use once, reduces transmission
8. **Washable overalls** – wash daily, reduces transmission
9. **Shoe covers** – use once, reduces transmission

Other general items should include:

10. Hand sanitizer, tissues, cleaning products, disposable cleaning cloths, and waste bags.

Cloth items should be washed daily. If travelling to many different homes/sites, then these should be changed to avoid transmission risk. Disposable items are just that, disposable, and they should be disposed of after each use and then hands washed for at least 20 seconds afterwards. Cleaning of surfaces and items touched over the course of a job must be done at all times. It is worth highlighting the need now more than ever to keep cleaning products safely away from children.

The simplest way of reducing transmission is to wash your hands frequently for at least 20 seconds.

Domestic Properties

The significant change to working practices begins when leaving home. There's little point in jumping in the van and sitting next to a colleague who is not from the same household. This would be fine if both live together at home, but picking others up to travel to work defeats the object of the social distancing guidance – increasing the risk to tradespeople, their own families and their customers. If anyone has to travel via public transport, then face masks are advisable and sanitiser essential. Prior to commencing work and upon completion clean your tools, preferably with a disinfectant wipe.

Before entering a domestic property, safe distancing measures and expectations must be agreed with the occupier. It would be good professional practice to consult with the consumer regarding a plan of safe working practices and a proposal for the implementation of these. A consumer will likely have their own expectations that should be a minimum starting point, to improve upon and exceed expectations. Professionalism in approach can help to increase customer confidence create a safer environment.

Working Practices

Government guidance when working closer to each other, such as the same room or space, is to work back-to-back wherever possible and side-by-side for a minimal period only, and to safely reduce the number of people doing activities. Utilising a fixed pairing system if people have to work in close proximity for carrying out work activities is another method of reducing contact. No one is obliged to work in an unsafe work environment and staff concerns should be listened to and addressed.

The wearing of face masks is not a legal requirement. Working within 2-metres of each other work, does not automatically mean a requirement to wear a face covering unless the type of work activity requires it. This could be using dust masks or respiratory protective equipment as normal. However, if tasks involve working closely together, the CIPHE recommends the wearing of a protective face covering, and employers can implement it as a condition of working. If an employer determines that PPE such as a face covering/mask should be worn, then they must provide it free of charge.

Wearing gloves in certain tasks isn't always practical, therefore frequently washing hands for at least 20 seconds is the alternative. This, of course, means that planning and risk assessing will require the use of water and a particular facility to do so. Make sure that if there is a need to turn the water off there is a temporary supply for washing hands and cleaning. This is not new as all work environments should have a suitable washing point for managing issues such as minor cuts etc. This standard working practice is part of first-aid risk assessing!

Cleaning surfaces that have been touched will be required. Therefore after, installing items such as boilers or a bathroom suite, all surfaces must be disinfected before departure or at the end of each day. In planning terms, it is crucial to allow for more time to make sure what it is done effectively.

Proud to be a Professional

Members of the CIPHE all share the value of being '*proud to be a professional*'. Never has there been more appropriate time to share this code with customers and the wider plumbing and heating community.

Ultimately, the plumbing and heating industry is a key sector and its members continue to provide crucial services during a pandemic. Everyone's safety is paramount.

Staying COVID-19 Secure in 2020

We confirm we have complied with the government's guidance on managing the risk of COVID-19

• FIVE STEPS TO SAFER WORKING TOGETHER •

- ✓ We have carried out a **COVID-19 risk assessment** and shared the results with the people who work here
- ✓ We have **cleaning, handwashing and hygiene procedures** in line with guidance
- ✓ We have taken all reasonable steps to **help people work from home**
- ✓ We have taken all reasonable steps to **maintain a 2m distance** in the workplace
- ✓ Where people cannot be 2m apart, we have done everything practical to **manage transmission risk**

Guidance

If you have any questions please contact Jerry Whiteley, Technical Manager, on 01708 463 117 or email jerryw@ciphe.org.uk

Alternatively, if you wish to report any concerns you might have contact the HSE on www.hse.gov.uk or 0300 003 1647