



CONTROL OF RESPIRATORY INFECTIONS, (including COVID 19) SITE OPERATING PROCEDURES

Background

These Site Operating Procedure, (SOP), aims are minimise the spread of respiratory infections such as coughs, colds or flu, including COVID-19, to protect Ascent Homes employees and their Contractors to enable them to continue to undertake their construction activities as well as business resilience. It replaces the Covid-19 SOPs. This will be done by ensuring that managers and employees are aware of workplace rules to minimise the risk of transmission. This SOP has been developed in line with national guidance from the Government, UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), NHS and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) along with additional temporary measures which are being maintained within Ascent Homes sites to safeguard staff, contractors and maintain service delivery.

The SOP provides the measures that Ascent Homes has put in place to prevent the transmission of respiratory infections and ensure that employees, operatives and contractors adhere to the control measures wherever possible within the workplace, in line with government guidance.

Managers, operatives, employees and contractors should ensure that this policy is read in conjunction with any service specific guidance or risk assessments and the current national guidance [Living safely with respiratory infections, including COVID-19](#)

What it means for employees, operatives, contractors

Managers / Supervisors – Are responsible for ensuring this policy is implemented by communicating workplace rules and ensuring that they are being adhered to within the workplace in a timely manner. Anyone with a responsibility for managing employees needs to articulate the importance of complying with these measures to protect themselves and others who may be vulnerable.

All employees/operatives – All employees and operatives should be aware of and adhere to this policy and any service specific control measures identified within risk assessments. Any national Covid guidance should also be adhered to. Appropriate support will be available from managers when needed with respect to interpretation of rules, service specific guidance and activity-based risk assessments

Contractors - Anybody visiting or who is based in an Ascent Homes site or workplace, for example contractors, maintenance, deliveries, externally employed individuals, must adhere to the infection prevention and control measures Ascent Homes has in place at all times. Line managers should be made aware of any instances where non-Ascent Homes staff are non-compliant.

Safety and Human Resource Staff - Are responsible for keeping this policy up to date in line with government guidance, signposting employees to appropriate support and advising line managers or employees on all aspects of this policy.

Introduction

As you will be aware, the Country has now progressed to the next step in the Government's plan, 'Living with COVID-19'. With the removal of all remaining legal restrictions, the emphasis is on individual behaviour and personal responsibility to comply with guidance. As we learn to live safely with COVID-19, there is a shift away from advice which is COVID-19 specific, to actions we can take to reduce the spread of all respiratory infections, many of which can spread easily and may cause serious illness in some people.

Summary of Control Measures

The following risk mitigation measures are general precautions which must be applied:

- Face to face meetings can take place where this is of benefit to a particular discussion, however, virtual meetings and walking meetings outside, where appropriate, are still encouraged.
- Increase ventilation
- Maintain environmental cleaning regimes
- Ensure good hand and respiratory hygiene



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- If you are unwell stay at home, especially if you have a high temperature.
- If you have symptoms of a respiratory illness, including COVID-19, stay at home and avoid contact with other people until you feel well enough to resume normal activities. Take a test if available.

During periods where transmission of respiratory infections is high, additional control measures may be introduced. When additional measures are to be introduced this will be communicated to you via internal communications and/or to your Line Manager. This will include:

- The wearing of face coverings in all communal areas of buildings, including corridors and welfare facilities, and in any situation where congestion occurs (unless you are exempt from wearing one due to underlying health or disability related reasons)
- Reducing the number of close contacts you have by maintaining social distancing of 1m plus, a mitigating measure from people outside your team where possible, including break periods and during meetings. Other mitigating measures include:
 - Wearing a face covering
 - Limiting the number of people you come into close contact with
 - Sitting/standing side by side or behind other people, rather than facing them in close contact
- Keeping interactions brief where possible

All employees must maintain good hand and respiratory hygiene by:

- Washing your hands (with soap and water) more often for at least 20 seconds; or using a hand sanitiser when getting home or arriving at work; after blowing your nose, sneezing or coughing; and before and after eating or handling food.
- Avoiding touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoiding close contact with those who have symptoms.
- Covering your cough or sneeze with a tissue, throw the tissue in the bin and wash your hands (catch it, bin it, kill it).
- Cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched objects and surfaces in the workplace.

Staff who were previously classed as Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) or who have a compromised immune system may wish to observe this guidance: [Guidance for people previously considered clinically extremely vulnerable from COVID-19 and COVID-19: guidance for people whose immune system means they are at higher risk](#)

Managers should refer to the Risk Assessment section of this policy for further information on requirements for vulnerable staff.

All staff should ensure they follow task specific risk assessments or arrangements within their work activity area. Where PPE is required, this will be provided by Ascent Homes and will be appropriate to specific activities.

From June 2022, staff and visitors to Ascent Homes sites will no longer be required to wear a face covering. Individuals can continue to wear one if they choose to or specific issues have been raised in a risk assessment.

First Aid - A fluid resistant face mask and other PPE can be worn where readily available, and a supply should be kept next to the first aid box. See [Resuscitation Council UK Statement on COVID-19 in relation to CPR and resuscitation in first aid and community settings](#), in respect of the latest advice around CPR and resuscitation.

Risk Assessment

Employees that were previously identified as CEV were subject to a more detailed vulnerable person's risk assessment which should remain in place and be kept under review. For fully vaccinated staff, the measures contained within activity risk assessments will mostly be sufficient to reduce the risk to a low level. For staff



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who are immunosuppressed (with a weakened immune system due to a particular health condition or who are on medication or treatment that is suppressing their immune system) additional precautions may be needed. Government guidance advises people who are immunosuppressed may wish to consider working from home if this feels right for them. If they cannot work from home, staff should talk to their manager about any temporary reasonable adjustments that could be made to reduce the risks whilst transmission rates are high. Any additional control measures agreed should be incorporated into their personalised risk assessment.

Where new staff are appointed and appropriate, a vulnerable person's risk assessment should then be completed by the individual's Manager, in conjunction with the individual, to agree any additional protective measures which may be needed.

Managers are already required to undertake a risk assessment for pregnant workers, which should include COVID-19 control measures. Adjustments should be in place for those staff who are over 26 weeks pregnant when the risk from COVID increases.

Ascent Homes has their own activity based specific risk assessments which identify mitigation measures that have been put in place to protect employees.

Different Working Environments

Office Environment – all QR check in codes should be removed from Ascent Homes premises. Cleaning materials are available for employee use and workstations **must** be cleaned and disinfected before and after use. Strict social distancing requirements have now been rescinded and two metre markers on floors can now be removed. However, during periods of high transmission of respiratory infection, staff should endeavour to minimise close contact with others outside their fixed team by maintaining at least one metre social distancing. The wearing of face coverings in communal areas of buildings by staff and others is likely to be required during these periods, unless they are exempt from wearing one due to underlying health or disability related reasons. This includes entry to Ascent Homes buildings, moving around corridors and using welfare facilities.

Maintain good ventilation by opening windows and through control of mechanical ventilation, where installed.

Staff should continue to maintain personal hygiene standards and cleanliness within staff welfare facilities including toilets, staff rooms, kitchens and canteens. You should use your own cutlery and crockery where possible, ensuring that any shared utensils, equipment or work surface are thoroughly cleaned before and after use.

Home/Customer Visits

Where possible, employees should call ahead prior to a visit to check if anyone in the household has tested positive for Covid-19 or are displaying symptoms. If they are and where possible, the visit should be rearranged.

Where the visit cannot be rearranged (e.g. emergency repairs), the symptomatic individual should be requested to remain in another part of the house. If they and all household members need to be seen, avoid making close contact by maintaining social distancing and follow your service specific risk assessment or procedure, which may include wearing a fluid resistant face mask. Ideally, see family members in a safe space outside/in the garden where possible or even through the window. If bedrooms or other areas of the house need to be seen, check if this can be done by photograph or other digital means by the family. Minimise the time for the visit where possible. Those who test positive or are symptomatic should be complying with this guidance: [People with symptoms of a respiratory infection including COVID-19](#)

Cleaners, Labourers and those involved in cleaning premises - When cleaning areas that have no known additional risk of contamination, no additional PPE is required (other than that already identified in existing risk assessments). Where there is visible contamination with bodily fluids, face masks, eye protection and a face



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visor may be needed in cases where there is a risk of splashing or exposure to respiratory droplets.

Working and Travelling Safely in a vehicle – When sharing vehicles with others the following measures should be taken:

- Ensure passengers are not symptomatic.
- Share the transport with the same people each time where possible (fixed teams or partnering)
- Keep to small groups of people at any one time
- Open windows for ventilation
- Set vents to allow fresh air into the vehicle
- Try to arrange seating to maximise distance between people in the vehicle
- Adopt increased cleaning of frequently touched surface, such as door handles.
- Maintain good hand and respiratory hygiene
- Encourage passengers to wear a face covering

External organisation and site visits - If you arrive at another location and feel unsafe, please report this to your line manager and do not continue with your visit until suitable measures are in place.

Covid-19 - Testing and Isolation Requirements for Staff with Symptoms of Respiratory Infection

Important: Separate government guidance is available for those working in higher risk social care around testing and isolation: [COVID-19 testing in adult social care](#). These requirements should be embedded into service specific procedures and risk assessments within these services. Such procedures are highlighted in this document for reference only in the Ascent Homes environment.

Staff with [symptoms of COVID-19 and other respiratory infections](#) who also have a high temperature or do not feel well enough to attend work must inform their line manager. If the employee is well enough, they can work from home or other adjustments may be possible where close contacts can be prevented in their job role. However, if the employee is unwell, or they are unable to work from home and adjustments are not possible to prevent close contacts in their job role, then they should be placed on sick leave and not return until at least 24 hours after the temperature has resolved. Any traditional tendency amongst staff towards attendance at work when displaying symptoms of respiratory illness exposes other staff to the risk of infection and should be discouraged.

The symptoms of respiratory infections, including COVID-19 staff need to consider include, but are not limited to -

- a continuous cough,
- a high temperature,
- fever or chills,
- loss of, or change in, your normal sense of taste or smell,
- shortness of breath,
- unexplained tiredness,
- lack of energy,
- muscle aches or pains that are not due to exercise,
- not wanting to eat or not feeling hungry,
- a headache that is unusual or longer lasting than usual,
- sore throat, stuffy or runny nose,
- diarrhoea, feeling sick or being sick.



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Asymptomatic testing – Access to free LFD testing for the wider public was removed on 1 April 2022. Staff are no longer required to routinely take a test unless they work in a high risk environment as follows, where access to free NHS LFD tests will continue ([order-coronavirus-rapid-lateral-flow-tests](#)) for:

- adult social care staff and a small number of visitors providing personal care – this includes care home, adult day centres and home care staff.
- hospice staff
- patient-facing staff in the NHS and NHS-funded independent healthcare provision
- some staff in prisons and some other places of detention
- Ascent Homes will not routinely provide LFDs for staff. If staff who are not required to undertake regular asymptomatic testing wish to test themselves, LFDs can be purchased from a range of outlets.

Symptomatic testing – testing for those who develop symptoms of Covid-19 will be provided free of charge to those working in high-risk environments or who meet certain criteria, mainly in the social care environment and won't apply to staff within Ascent Homes, with the exception of:

- Those eligible for COVID-19 antiviral and other treatments, who will be sent a pack of tests and can request replacements if they need them.

Staff with a positive COVID-19 test – if an employee tests positive (regardless of how they obtained the test) they should notify their line manager immediately and not attend the workplace. If the employee is able to, they can work from home. However, if they are unwell or unable to work from home then they should be placed on sick leave. They should stay at home for 5 days starting the day after the test date and follow this [guidance](#). Even if they have no symptoms, they may still be infectious to others. If after 5 days, they still feel unwell and have a high temperature they should continue to stay at home. They should avoid meeting [people at higher risk from COVID-19](#) for 10 full days following the date of the test.

Where an employee tests positive and exposure could have resulted from working with clients who are known to have COVID-19 (confirmed by a test), their manager must report it to their line manager, and include information on their work activity. This will allow an assessment to be made to ascertain if the case is notifiable to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) under RIDDOR. (Social care and laboratory work activities in the main).

If any household contacts of employees are isolating due to being symptomatic or testing positive for COVID-19, the employee should inform their manager and agree a temporary adjustment, such as working from home if they are able to or other measures in line with the following guidance: [People with symptoms of a respiratory infection including COVID-19](#)

When signing in, visitors should be asked to confirm they are not symptomatic; if they are the visit should be rearranged. It should also be established if anyone in their household is currently isolating due to testing positive. If so, they should be following the guidance for close contacts. People with symptoms of a respiratory infection including COVID-19 and limit contact with others, especially those who are vulnerable. The visit should be rearranged or held virtually. If this isn't possible and the visit is essential, then they should be asked to wear a face covering and maintain social distancing and limit contact with others, especially those who are vulnerable.

If a Manager suspects an outbreak of respiratory infection (including COVID-19) in an Ascent Homes workplace advice should be sought from the Public Health Team PublicHealth@northumberland.gov.uk. An outbreak of respiratory infection in the workplace would include an unusually high and / or rapidly increasing number of staff absences with symptoms of respiratory infection where illness appears to be spread in the workplace.

Working from Home

Please see the Advance Northumberland, (AN), SharePoint page for support and advice on keeping fit and healthy when working from home. Remember the importance of micro breaks, taking a lunch break and moving working



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positions as frequently as possible.

It is important that all employees' conduct remains in accordance with AN and Ascent Homes policies and procedures and that data, confidentiality and work is secure at all times. Confidential information must not be disposed of in normal household waste.

All employees working from home should have a DSE workstation risk assessment in place for their home workstation. See AN SharePoint Health and Safety page.

Managers may need to update their lone working procedures to take account of home working activities where staff are home alone during the working day. It should be ensured that staff home addresses and emergency contact details are up to date and easily accessible by the relevant line manager.

Managers should maintain regular contact with staff during the working week.

Meetings

Face to face meetings can take place where this is of benefit to a particular discussion, however, virtual meetings and walking meetings outside, where appropriate, are still encouraged. Virtual meetings not only eliminate the chance of spread of infection, but are better for the environment due to reduced travel and they save time so are more efficient

Cleaning materials and hand sanitiser should be available in all meeting rooms.

There is no restriction on the number of employees allowed where a gathering is considered reasonably necessary provided that the venue is large enough to accommodate adequate controls in line with this policy. Large gatherings should be subject to a risk assessment. which should take into account the current rate of prevalence of respiratory infection. In particular, any whole team activities, such as workload planning events, will need careful consideration as any outbreak amongst staff could impact on service provision.

During periods of high transmission, building, office and meeting room occupancy may be limited with reduced seating to allow social distancing to be observed. Both the room booking system and local signage clearly state how many people are allowed in a room at one time and must be adhered to.

Non-compliance

Every employee has a personal responsibility to adhere to the control measures in place wherever possible, and to seek clarification if they are unsure.

If employees are concerned that measures detailed in this policy or contained within service specific procedures or risk assessments have not been put in place in their workplace, they should raise this with their line manager in the first instance.

If an employee refuses or fails to adhere to the arrangements in place, this may be considered to be a disciplinary or code of conduct issue and will be considered in line with the Ascent Homes Disciplinary Policy.

Vaccinations against respiratory infections, including COVID-19

Ascent Homes strongly encourages all eligible staff to participate in ongoing vaccination programmes, including seasonal influenza (flu) and COVID-19, where it is safe to do so in individual circumstances. This is a key part of Ascent Homes overall strategy and commitment to maintaining a safe workplace, where the spread of respiratory infections is minimised, in accordance with government guidance. Almost all individuals can be safely vaccinated with all vaccines in accordance with current guidance. In very few individuals, some vaccines may be contraindicated or should be deferred.

If any employee is concerned about getting the vaccine, they should discuss these concerns with their line manager. The NHS advice and guidance in relation to the vaccine can be found here: [coronavirus information from the NHS](#).



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COVID-19 vaccinations are recommended in pregnancy as this is the best way to protect both women and their babies. The benefits and risks of having the vaccine can be discussed with healthcare professionals to reach a joint decision based on individual circumstances. Please see [here](#) for further information.

If employees cannot book an appointment for their vaccine outside of their working hours, they can attend their appointment during the working day. Please ensure your line manager is aware of your appointment date and time.

Monitoring and Audit

Government and public health guidelines and restrictions and Local Government best practice regarding Covid-19 and Covid-19 vaccines are changing rapidly as new information becomes available, further research is conducted, and additional vaccines are approved and distributed. Ascent Homes reserves the right to modify this policy at any time to adapt to changing circumstances and organisational needs, consistent with Ascent Homes commitment to maintain a safe and healthy workplace.

Responsibility for the implementation, monitoring and development of this policy lies with the Development Director of Ascent Homes. Day to day operation of the policy is the responsibility of Construction Manager, Contractors Manager and Site Managers who will ensure that this policy is adhered to.

Training and Support

Advice can be gained from the Health and Safety and Human Resources Departments in relation to the implementation of this policy.

Clear guidance and signage relating to measures in place should be clearly located in Ascent Homes premises.

Where further training and/or support is required, guides, written descriptions of buildings and national advice should be consulted. An employee should speak to their line manager about any additional needs they may have that could impact on their ability to adhere to this policy. Line managers should also recognise which of their employees may have additional needs.

Such changes to working practices can be stressful for employees. Employees can access information on a wide range of Health and Wellbeing guidance via AN SharePoint site. Staff network groups, for example BHAW Group are also accessible virtually for all employees.

Associated Documentation and References

Reference	Title
Living safely with respiratory infections, including COVID-19 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)	(COVID-19) Living Safely with Respiratory Infections, including Covid-19
Reducing the spread of respiratory infections, including COVID-19, in the workplace - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)	Reducing the spread of respiratory infections, including COVID-19, in the workplace
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-	Guidance for people previously considered clinically extremely vulnerable from Covid-19



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19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19	
COVID-19: guidance for people whose immune system means they are at higher risk - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)	COVID-19: guidance for people whose immune system means they are at higher risk
https://www.gov.uk/guidance/people-with-symptoms-of-a-respiratory-infection-including-covid-19	People with symptoms of a respiratory infection including COVID-19
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/our-plan-to-rebuild-the-uk-governments-covid-19-recovery-strategy/our-plan-to-rebuild-the-uk-governments-covid-19-recovery-strategy	Our plan to rebuild the UK: The Government's Covid-19 recovery strategy
https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/immunisation-against-infectious-disease-the-green-book#the-green-book	Immunisation against infectious disease The Green Book has the latest information on vaccines and vaccination procedures, for vaccine preventable infectious diseases in the UK.
Long COVID Risk Assessment v1.docx (sharepoint.com)	Long Covid Risk Assessment
Vulnerable Persons Risk Assessment - COVID19 - v6.docx (sharepoint.com)	Vulnerable Persons Risk Assessment

Summary of physical and managerial controls in place on our sites

Regular toolbox/briefings given to staff
 Posters displayed on all sites
 Face coverings available
 Operatives eligible for Coronavirus/Flu booster encouraged to receive it.
 Meetings to continue virtually wherever practical.
 Where meetings in person are to go ahead, controls including good ventilation, good hygiene and space will be considered.
 Attendee discouraged if showing any Coronavirus or Flu symptoms.
 Avoid overcrowding in door meeting spaces.
 Meetings with customers and others will be by appointment only.
 Outside space used where possible for meeting etc.
 External washbasins with hot and cold water, soap and paper towels provided on each site.
 Staggered breaks in place for canteens.
 Operatives can use vehicles for breaks.



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Sanitising gel stations set out at strategic positions through internal and external points on site.
Cleaner employed to complete enhanced cleaning. Work activities and cleaning schedule prescribed.
Dining tables set out to maintain social distancing between work groups or gangs.
Numbers of operatives working within plot limited to same people, gang or cohort.
Office / welfare, kettle/microwave to be disinfected regularly, and throughout the day to ensure infection control is being monitored.
Screens erected in site office to protect site managers.
PPE such as gloves will be self-issued.
Plan all other work to minimise contact between workers.
Re-usable PPE will be thoroughly cleaned after use and not shared between workers.
Single use PPE will be disposed of so that it cannot be reused.
Ventilation will be increased in enclosed spaces, leaving all doors open to prevent multiple operators touching handles.
Regularly cleaning will be undertaken on the inside of vehicle cabs and between uses by different operators.
Bins provided and regularly emptied. Lids removed.
Any suspected Coronavirus related waste should be double bagged and segregated for 72 hours before disposal.
Sub-contractors RAMS have been reviewed and incorporate controls measures for respiratory infections.
Ensure that all employees are briefed with the Respiratory Infections Policy and updates are sent out as required to everyone including remote workers.
To monitor staff and ensure that anyone displaying any of the detailed symptoms are sent home and asked to self-isolate.
Ensure sufficient PPE available. Gloves/mask, face covering if applicable.