

An tÚdarás Sláinte agus Sábháilteachta Health and Safety Authority

> Occupational Safety and Health Guidance on Remote Working





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Introduction to **Remote Working**

Remote working refers to work activities undertaken away from the employer's normal work premises including in a domestic setting or in a remote working hub. The adoption of remote working arrangements was accelerated by the COVID-19 public health emergency which required many workers to work from home. Remote working has been further facilitated by advances in technology and the development of remote working hubs. Many employers are, in consultation with their employees, developing or finalising their longer-term arrangements for remote working.

The responsibility for safety and health at work rests with the employer regardless of whether an employee works remotely or at the employer's premises. If an employer wishes to offer remote working away from the employer's normal work premises, they are responsible for organising the work. Where an employer provides work equipment such as computers, laptops, display screens, keyboards, chairs or desks, they are responsible for maintaining the work equipment provided. Where an employee uses their own work equipment, the employer is responsible for ensuring that the work equipment is suitable to meet the required standards for the employee's safety and health.

In providing a safe remote workplace, the workstation will need to be assessed along with other relevant safety and health hazards. Any measures taken by employers to ensure the safety, health and welfare at work should not involve financial cost to employees. The information in this guidance document is designed to support employers and employees with the practicalities of managing safety and health effectively for those who are working remotely.

Responsibility for safety and health at work rests with the employer whether or not that work is being done remotely. Employers

must provide a safe work environment and, in doing so, assess the risks and ensure appropriate controls are put in place.

The following questions are a useful starting point:

- Where will the remote work be undertaken?
- Is it on a full time, part time or ad-hoc basis?
- · Will the employee be working in a workspace that is suitable?
- What work equipment will be required?
- What means of communication and training will be provided while the employee is working remotely?
- Have employees been consulted and communicated with?

Employees working remotely also have a responsibility to take reasonable care while at work, and must:

- Co-operate with their employer and follow agreed safety procedures,
- Protect themselves from harm during their work; for example, use any equipment provided correctly and report any defects immediately to the employer, and
- Report any injury arising from the work activity to their employer immediately.



Managing Remote Working

2.1 - Overview

Employers must manage and conduct work activities in such a way to ensure the safety, health and welfare of their employees at work, so far as reasonably practicable. To do this, they must identify and put in place any safety, health and welfare measures required for the protection of their employees at their place of work. This requirement applies to work activities undertaken remotely from the employer's normal workplace including in a domestic setting, remote working hub or other place of work.

A safety, health and welfare at work assessment checklist for remote working is included in part 3 of this document. The assessment involves a three-step process. The three steps are associated with different sections of the assessment checklist. The assessment checklist has seven sections.



Work activity



Section 1

Section 2

Employee information

Workplace equipment

Step 2

Assessment of hazards



Section 3

Section 4

Section 5

Work environment

Workstation

Communication, consultation and accident reporting

Monitor, review and communicate with employees regularly



Section 6

Records management Section 7

Additional information or notes

2.2 - Three Steps to Managing Remote Working

Employers must ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare at work of their employees. It is the employer's responsibility to proactively ensure that the assessment is completed for each employee by a suitably trained, competent person and account is taken of changing circumstances.



Step 1 - Work activity

Identify the type of work to be undertaken remotely and what equipment and resources are required. In consideration of the work to be undertaken remotely, an employer is obliged to identify the hazards and assess the risks at the place of work.

For example, if an employee's remote work requires them to use display screen equipment at a workstation as part of their normal work activities, employers will need to provide, in addition to the workstation desk and chair, equipment such as a mouse, keyboard and monitor. The assessment should consider the user's needs, space restrictions and time spent at the workstation. The specific equipment required may differ based on individual workstation assessments.





Step 2 - Assessment of hazards

The assessment of the hazards and risks at the place of work must consider the:

- Work environment
- Work activity
- Work equipment
- Workstation
- Sensitive workers including those with disabilities
- Employee health and welfare and communications

Work environment

It is important that the employee has a safe work environment to perform their work activities. The workstation should be set up in an appropriate work environment with sufficient space to work freely. The place of work should have safe access. In addition, for example it should have adequate:

- Lighting
- Ventilation
- Temperature
- Access to welfare facilities, and be free from:
 - Slip, trip and fall hazards
 - Noise and distractions

A plan should be in place in case of an emergency. The plan will vary depending on the location and type of remote place of work (for example, domestic setting or remote working hub). This plan should be analysed during the assessment process. If the remote working place of work is in a high radon area, an appropriate risk assessment shall be undertaken.

Work equipment

Employers have a duty to provide safe systems of work, work equipment and to maintain that work equipment. Employers must identify what equipment employees need to work remotely and agree these with the employee. The equipment required will depend on the work to be carried out. Identified equipment can be recorded in the assessment checklist provided in Section 3 of this document. Such equipment may include:

- · Work desk and adjustable chair,
- IT equipment, such as a monitor, keyboard and mouse, and
- A headset if dealing with frequent calls or meetings.



Where an employer provides work equipment, they are responsible for maintaining the work equipment that has been provided. Electrical equipment provided to employees should be checked regularly and used correctly.

Where an employee uses their own work equipment, the employer is responsible for ensuring that work equipment is suitable to meet the requirements of the employee's safety and health.

Workstation

When completing the assessment, the employee's interaction with the workstation should be examined (for example, duration spent at the workstation, workstation location), and account taken of the work activities.

Where employees use display screen equipment (DSE) such as a laptop connected to desktop monitors as part of their normal work activities, then a DSE risk assessment must be undertaken by a competent person. This will help identify any safety and health concerns that could affect the employee, and if additional controls or equipment are required.



Where occupational related safety and health concerns have been identified, then appropriate control measures should be put in place considering the minimum requirements of the General Application Regulations¹.

Managing the risks of employees who work at workstations and use display screen equipment for extended periods of time is

important to prevent the risk of developing musculoskeletal disorders and other health issues.

Musculoskeletal Disorders or MSDs are injuries and disorders that affect the human body's movement or musculoskeletal system (for example, muscles, tendons, ligaments, nerves, discs, blood vessels).

MSDs can be caused by:

- Repetition using the same muscle groups over and over during the working day with no time for recovery,
- Poor work posture incorrect positioning of a display screen or a seat at a workstation can result in the employee adopting an awkward slouched posture, and
- Poor lighting conditions at a workstation may result in eye fatigue and the employee adopting an awkward posture to view the display screen.

It is the employer's responsibility to proactively ensure that the DSE assessment is completed for each employee by a suitably trained, competent person. The person undertaking the assessment will engage with the employee on the set up of the workstation, the employee's individual characteristics (height, body weight, etc.), and how they use their workstation. If occupational safety and health issues are identified during the assessment, an action plan should be agreed to address those issues and be reviewed as required.

The assessment needs to take all factors into account including the:

- Nature of the work to be completed,
- · Set-up of the equipment at the workstation,

^{1.} S.I. No. 299 of 2007 Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007 Chapter 5 and Schedule 4 Minimum Requirements for all Display Screen Equipment which includes information on the monitor, keyboard, and work desk.

- General environment at the specific workstation,
- Individual employee characteristics (for example, body height), and
- Employee feedback.

This is to ensure the risks are remedied before they result in the onset of any physical problems for the employee, and to reduce any stress associated with this.

Employers and employees should take steps to reduce the risks identified by the assessment. If the assessment indicates that a piece of work equipment is required, then the employer must make this equipment available to the employee.

Further workstation risk assessment is required in certain situations. This includes when:

- The nature of the work changes
- There are changes in the location of the employee's place of work
- The duration of remote work changes
- · There are changes in the location of the workstation

To address the changing nature of remote work or work location, a remote workstation risk assessment for the employee should be completed. This should incorporate additional information, guidance, advice, training, and instructions to support the employee when setting up their workstation. As part of this assessment, employers may need to consult with the operator of the remote workplace (for example, remote working hub).

Further information on workstation and display screen risk assessment can be found at www.hsa.ie

Poor lighting conditions at a computer workstation can result in eye fatique. Employees who use display screen equipment (DSE) on a regular basis should be informed about eyesight testing which

must be made available to them, and costs covered by the employer. If corrective lenses and frames are required for DSE work, the costs for basic frames and lenses must be covered by the employer.

Employee health and welfare including sensitive risk workers and those with disabilities

The employer has a duty to have in place safe systems of work to protect employees' health and welfare, including when they work remotely. Employers have a duty to ensure employees working remotely are managed and supervised. Employers need to communicate with their employees and provide training to ensure employees are clear about their role, what is expected of them, and that respectful behaviours are adhered to. Work should be allocated appropriately and be suitable in terms of the employee's ability to undertake such work in a remote work location.

Remote working may also lead to reduced social interaction with fellow workers or customers. Longer working hours may also occur when the boundary between work and remote work location is not fixed. Employers should ensure there is regular communication with their employees, and that supports are available to those working remotely.

Employees should structure their day for work related activities and breaks. Employees should discuss issues face to face (including face to face virtually) with their manager where possible. Face to face meetings and face to face video calls can help people to relate to each other more. It also affords a manager an opportunity to assess if an employee is affected by stress.

Where welfare facilities (for example, toilets and canteens) are provided by third party operators, for example, at a remote working hub, these should be adequately maintained.

It is essential that the working conditions and the work to be carried out do not adversely affect the safety and health of employees from sensitive risk groups such as pregnant, post-natal and breastfeeding employees and those with disabilities. Where an employee from a sensitive risk group, or an employee with a disability, works remotely, the employer should consider the suitability of the person to the work in the context of their remote working environment.

Further information on sensitive risk groups can be found at www.hsa.ie

Reporting work-related incidents

Reporting of work-related accidents or incidents is also applicable to work undertaken remotely. Employees have a duty to take reasonable care of their own safety and health as well as others who may be affected by the work they are doing. Employees need to be familiar with their employers' procedures and requirements for reporting work-related accidents, ill-health or any safety and health concerns in the remote workplace. If, following an accident while at work,

an employee is unable to carry out their normal work for more than three consecutive days, excluding the day of the incident, this should be reported to the Health and Safety Authority accident and dangerous occurrences portal available at www.hsa.ie For more information about reporting Work Related Accidents, see www.hsa.ie

Other hazards

The list of hazards indicated in this quidance is non-exhaustive. Other hazards may also be relevant depending on the place of work or the work activity. For example, radon is a radioactive gas that is formed naturally in the ground which can enter the workplace through small cracks in floors and through gaps around pipes or cables. If the occupied workplace is at around or basement level, then visit www. radon.ie to view the workplace high-radon map and for further information.

Information on other relevant hazards is available at **www.hsa.ie** and www.BeSMART.ie

Also, please see our free online training platform - hsalearning.ie





Step 3 - Monitor, review and communicate with employees regularly

It is important to have regular communication with employees and to keep accurate records of the assessment(s). Assessments should be reviewed on a regular basis and in consultation with employees. This should be done when there have been significant changes to the work activity, place of work or if the employee reports musculoskeletal discomfort. A means of contact and arrangements for regular updates via phone, web or email should also be in place.



Safety, Health, and Welfare at Work **Assessment Checklist for Remote Working**

When completing the assessment, the employee's interaction with the workstation should be examined (for example, duration spent at the workstation and workstation location), and account taken of the work activities. The assessment should consider Part 2, 3 and 4 of the Act² and the requirements in the General Application Regulations.³

It is the employer's responsibility to ensure, as far as reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare of employees. The employer has a duty to provide safe systems of work and to manage

employees' safety, health, and welfare both when they are in the workplace and when they work remotely. Employers should ensure that the system of work for those who work remotely is reasonable.

NOTE:

- It is the employer's responsibility to proactively ensure that the remote work assessment is completed for each employee by a suitably trained and competent person.
- Additional controls if identified during the assessment can be added to Sections 3, 4 and 5 and any other relevant information can be added to Section 7 of the checklist.

Step 1 - Work activity

Identify who is working remotely, the type of work to be undertaken remotely, and what equipment or resources are required.

Section 1 - Employee information

Name:	
Location:	
Job Title:	
Work Activity:	
Assessor:	
Manager:	

Section 2 - Work equipment

Where an employer provides work equipment such as computers, laptops, display screens, keyboards, chairs or desks, they are responsible for maintaining the work equipment provided. Where an employee uses their own work equipment, the employer is responsible for ensuring that work equipment is suitable to meet the requirements for the employee's safety and health.

^{2.} Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 (Number 10 of 2005)

^{3.} S.I. No. 299 of 2007 Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007 Chapter 5 and Schedule 4 Minimum Requirements for all Display Screen Equipment which includes information on the monitor, keyboard, and work desk.

Work Equipment	Provided by:	In use	Suitable for Remote Work	Equipment Identified / Required for Undertaking Remote Work
Desk				
Chair				
Laptop				
Desktop Computer				
Display Screen (Monitor)				
Keyboard				
Mouse				
Task Lighting				
Docking Station				
Document Holder				
Footrest				
Wrist Rest				
Mobile Phone				
Headset				
Further information				

Step 2 - Remote work assessment

The assessment of the hazards and risks at the place of work needs to take account of the:

- Work environment,
- Workstation including display screen equipment (DSE) and work equipment,
- Employee health and welfare, including sensitive risk workers and those with disabilities, and
- · Communication and incident reporting.

Section 3 - Work environment

Work environment means the place where work is carried out (for example, in a domestic setting, remote working hub or other location) and environmental conditions associated with the place of work. Certain hazards may be relevant depending on the place of work or work activity. For more information visit www.hsa.ie.

Controls	Yes	No	N/A	Notes			
Place of work							
Is the place of work suitable for the work to be undertaken?							
Lighting							
Is suitable lighting (for example natural, task lighting) available for the type of work being carried out and the employees' vision?							
Is additional task lighting required?							
Heating and Ventilation							
Can temperatures be regulated? (For most people an acceptable temperature for office work lies within the range of 18°C to 23°C).							
Is there adequate ventilation in the workplace? Ventilation can be regulated naturally (window or door) or mechanically.							
Electricity	`	`	,				
Is the employee aware that they should check and advise their employer of any defects?							
Is electrical equipment provided to employees used correctly, checked for frayed wires, signs of burns or melting, and is unsafe equipment taken out of use?							
Is there an adequate number of sockets available?							

Safe Access		
Is there safe access to and from the remote workplace?		
Emergency Planning		
Is there a plan in place in case of an emergency?		
Housekeeping		
Is the workstation area clear of trailing cables and other trip hazards?		
Is the employee made aware to keep the area clear?		
Additional Identified Controls		

Section 4 - Workstation including Display Screen Equipment (DSE) and work equipment

Workstation - means an assembly comprising of display screen equipment, which may be provided with a keyboard or input device, software or a combination of the following:

- · Work chair, work desk or work surface; and
- Other work equipment or peripherals. For example, footrest, document holder, docking station.

The employer is responsible for providing and maintaining work equipment identified for the work such as computers, monitors, keyboards, chairs, desks etc., or equipment identified following a risk assessment.

NOTE: Employees can use their own equipment if deemed suitable.

Controls	Yes	No	N/A	Notes				
Desk and Workstation								
Is there enough knee clearance underneath the workstation?								
Is there enough space to allow the employee to change position and vary movements?								
Is the area clutter free so that the employee can focus easily on the task?								
Is a document holder required to read documents?								
Chair								
Is the chair provided stable, adjustable in height, allows freedom of movement, and provides lower back support?								
Is the chair set up so that the forearms are level with the desk?								
Does the chair have a back rest which is adjustable in height and has the employee been advised to sit back in their seat in order to get good lumbar support?								
Is the chair provided adjustable to allow feet to rest flat on the floor or is a footrest supplied?								
Is a footrest required?								

Display Screen		
Is the screen positioned to avoid glare and reflection (for example, sit at 90 degrees to a window to avoid glare)?		
Can the screen swivel and tilt easily?		
Is the screen positioned so that the top of the screen is at eye level or slightly below and avoids sustained bending of the neck?		
Is the screen free of reflective glare and are reflections liable to cause discomfort?		
Is the screen set up at a comfortable distance (for example, arm length away)?		
Is the image on the screen stable with no flickering?		
Are the characters on the display screen well defined, clearly formed of adequate size and with adequate spacing?		
Has the employee been informed that they should relax their shoulders when viewing the screen?		
Keyboard and Mouse		
Is the laptop or PC connected to an external keyboard and mouse?		
Is a neutral wrist posture maintained when typing (for example, no bending of the wrist)?		
Can the slope angle of the keyboard be adjusted to allow the employee to find a comfortable position?		
Are the mouse and keyboard within easy reach and is space provided in front of the keyboard?		
Are wrist rests required?		
Musculoskeletal		
Has the employee been advised to change posture frequently and to stand and move at least every 30 minutes?		
Has the employee been advised to avoid back- to-back video calls or online meetings so that they do not sit for long periods of time?		

Does the employee get aches, pains, tingling or pins and needles in the hands, arms, shoulders, neck or back area when using the workstation?			
Communication			
Is a headset / speaker or microphone provided?			
Is a headset / speaker or microphone required for communciation?			
Manual Handling			
Is the employee required to conduct manual handling while remote working? (If yes, has that employee been trained)?			
Eye Examinations			
Have employees who use DSE been informed of the provisions for eyesight testing and how to avail of eyesight testing?			
Are eye and eyesight tests provided as needed?			
Does the employee regularly suffer from blurred or poor vision, sore eyes or headaches while			
using the display screen equipment?			
using the display screen equipment?			
Using the display screen equipment? Other Considerations Has the assessment of workstation including display screen equipment (DSE) and work equipment considered the needs of sensitive			
Using the display screen equipment? Other Considerations Has the assessment of workstation including display screen equipment (DSE) and work equipment considered the needs of sensitive workers including those with disabilities? Has the employee been provided with information and training to ensure they can carry			
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Other Considerations Has the assessment of workstation including display screen equipment (DSE) and work equipment considered the needs of sensitive workers including those with disabilities? Has the employee been provided with information and training to ensure they can carry out their work safely? Where the employee has more than one remote working location, have additional supports, guidance and training been provided to assist them to set up at other remote working locations?			
Other Considerations Has the assessment of workstation including display screen equipment (DSE) and work equipment considered the needs of sensitive workers including those with disabilities? Has the employee been provided with information and training to ensure they can carry out their work safely? Where the employee has more than one remote working location, have additional supports, guidance and training been provided to assist them to set up at other remote working locations?			

Section 5 - Consultation, communication and incident reporting

Maintaining good consultation and communication with remote workers helps determine whether the safety and health arrangements are working.

Keeping good records, reviewing and following up on corrective actions ensures a safe remote work environment.

Controls	Vac	No	NI / A	Notes			
	Yes	No	N/A	Notes			
Consultation and Communication							
Are arrangements in place to consult with employees?							
Are there arrangements in place for keeping in contact, and is the employee informed of these?							
Is there an established means of contact for communicating and providing updates (for example, via phone, web or email as required)?							
Can employees report safety and health issues (for example, health related issues, workload, faulty equipment etc.)?							
Are arrangements in place to report psychosocial issues (for example, work related stress, difficulties maintaining boundaries between home and work, social isolation, managing change in work, bullying etc.)?							
Incident Reporting	*						
Has the employee been advised of the procedures for reporting any work-related incidents, (for example, musculoskeletal discomfort)?							
Additional Identified Controls							

Step 3 - Monitor, review	v and communica	ıte with e	mplo	/ees r	egularly
Section 6 - Records manag	ement				
In this section it is important that follow up measures are reviewed on a regular basis location(s) and frequency o	e actioned. The remost and this can vary c	ote working	gasses	sment	needs to be
Date Assessment Carried (Out:				
Elava - Na					
Employee Name:	Employee Sig	nature:		Dat	e:
Employee Name:	Employee Sig	nature:		Dat	e:
Employee Name: Assessor Name:	Employee Sign			Dat	
	Assessor Sign			Dat	
Assessor Name:	Assessor Sign			Dat	e: e Corrective Actions
Assessor Name:	Assessor Sign			Dat	e: e Corrective Actions
Assessor Name:	Assessor Sign			Dat	e: e Corrective Actions
Assessor Name:	Assessor Sign			Dat	e: e Corrective Actions
Assessor Name:	Assessor Sign			Dat	e: e Corrective Actions

Date of Next Review:	
Section 7 – Additional information or notes	

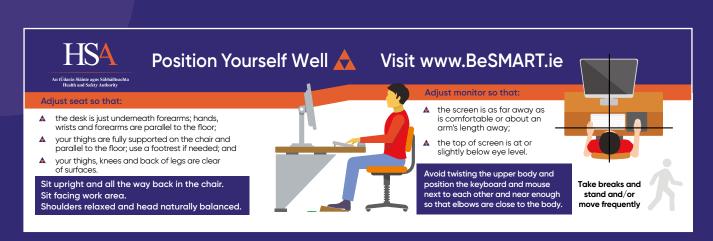
Additional Notes:	

BeSMART.ie



WORKPOSITIVE

www.workpositive.ie





An tÚdarás Sláinte agus Sábháilteachta <u>Health and Safety Authority</u>

Further Information and Guidance:

Visit our website at www.hsa.ie
Telephone our contact centre on 0818 289 389 or email
contactus@hsa.ie. Use BeSMART.ie, our free online risk
assessment tool.. Check out our range of free online
courses at www.hsalearning.ie