

Dear Business owner,

**Covid-19 - Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974**

We hope you have had a successful return to operation since lockdown began to ease and various sectors have been allowed to reopen. There is, however, a long way to go to ensure Newcastle remains a safe place in which to live, work and do business.

With more people returning to the city centre, we want to reiterate the requirements needed to help protect the city from COVID-19. You may already be doing your utmost but recent events in the city have raised concerns about compliance with health guidance.

In the last week, three businesses have closed their doors after staff members tested positive for COVID-19, with their workers and their close contacts having to go into self-isolation. Case numbers in the city are rising and we are anxious to ensure they do not rise further.

Government schemes such as Eat Out to Help Out drive increased numbers of people into city centre premises, providing the virus with more opportunities to spread, both to workers and customers.

As a duty holder under the above legislation you are required to have risk assessments with strict and thorough measures in place to ensure your business premises are COVID secure. This includes steps to facilitate social distancing, hand-washing facilities, cleaning regimes, and systems which ensure staff are implementing these measures whether patrons are present or not. [There are government guides](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19) designed to help you in this respect.

You should also have in place robust Test and Trace mechanisms so that in the event of an outbreak, Public Health England can identify any individuals who may need to self-isolate.

Sufficient training, staffing levels, and resources such as PPE should be available to cope with demand and to allow staff to go about their roles in a manner which is safe for both them and customers. The following is a [link to HSE guidance](https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/working-safely/risk-assessment.htm) on Covid risk assessments.

Where a positive case is recorded, or you suspect an employee may be infected, you must [follow PHE guidance as set out in the action cards and inform the Newcastle City Council SPOC](https://www.newcastle.gov.uk/services/public-health-wellbeing-and-leisure/public-health-services/coronavirus-covid-19/covid). Without up-to-date intelligence, we cannot implement the Newcastle COVID Control plan effectively and we risk increased transmission.

It is vital that these standards are maintained and we do not become complacent.

We would strongly prefer not to have to take enforcement action, and we have endeavoured to help businesses reopen as much as possible. **But should non-compliances occur at any bar, pub, restaurant or café, we will not hesitate to use appropriate powers in protecting public and staff health.**

We appreciate that the behaviour of customers plays a significant role in your success and we will continue also to work to remind citizens of their responsibilities.

**Important note on the use and meaning of tests**

We have noticed that some businesses are responding to the occurrence of a COVID case in one of their staff by asking their remaining staff to be tested and then allowing them back to work if negative. **This should not be done** as test results may be negative while contacts are actually incubating the disease. If other staff are considered to be contacts within the guidance, they must self-isolate for 14 days and should only be tested if they become symptomatic. Extended staff testing should only be undertaken at the request of the Health Protection Team and the Team’s advice should be sought in the first instance

We urge you to do everything necessary to help prevent our city succumbing to further outbreaks.

If you have any queries or need further support, please get in touch at psr@newcastle.gov.uk or call Public Health England on 0300 303 8596.

Sincerely,

Prof. Eugene Milne
Director of Public Health for Newcastle



Christine Herriot
Newcastle City Council Director of Operations and Regulatory Services

