

Return to Work Safely Protocol & What you need to know:

Covid-19 Reopening Society and Business, how does this affect me?

Covid-19 has had a profound effect on all our daily lives. Restrictions that have been in place as a result, have seen the vast majority of us having to stay at home, with only short trips for exercise or shopping permitted. Because of our collective efforts and strict adherence to the restrictions, everyone has played their part in saving lives. There have been two important documents published that will guide our return to working life. Fórsa have produced a comprehensive guide to understanding these documents that can be read in full [here](#).

The [Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business](#) sets out how the COVID-19 restrictions will be lifted in a series of phases commencing on the 18th of May. However whilst it may be possible for employers to request attendance at work for the completion of essential or urgent duties, (that are not possible from home), the 18th of May does not signify a return to “business as usual” and remote working should continue where possible.

In advance of re-opening workplaces fully, employers need to adhere to the [Return to Work Safely Protocol](#) that has been developed. **Members should familiarise themselves with the contents of this document.**

This protocol comes out of lengthy discussions at the Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF). This body is comprised of four members representing employers and four members representing trade unions. Fórsa’s General Secretary, Kevin Callinan is directly involved in these meetings in his capacity as the Vice-President of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions.

The Health and Safety Authority (HSA) will have oversight and enforcement authority over the Return to Work Safely Protocol and in ensuring employers comply with the obligations contained within.

All indications are, that we will be living with Covid-19, for some time and measures will need to be in place to ensure our health, safety and welfare in the workplace, in advance of workplaces returning to normal.

- **What does this mean for me?**

The Protocol should be used by all workplaces to adapt their workplace procedures and practices to comply fully with the COVID-19 related public health protection measures identified as necessary by the HSE. It sets out in very clear terms for employers and workers the steps that they must take before a workplace reopens, and while it continues to operate.

- **Lead Worker Representative (Covid-19)**

A Covid-19 Officer will be appointed before there is a return to work of all staff. This Covid-19 (Lead Worker Representative) works with the employer, Employees Health & Safety Rep and the employments’ Health & Safety Committee (or Covid-19 Response Management Team).

They all work collaboratively to develop, update, implement and communicate all requirements of the *Return to Work Safely Protocol*. These Lead Worker Representatives (Covid-19) should be clearly identifiable to all staff and visitors to the workplace. Employers must provide training to enable these Lead Worker Representatives to carry out their function.

The union should have a key role in identifying the Lead Worker Representatives and any grade of Worker be they, School Secretary or SNA etc. can put themselves forward to volunteer. The union would urge any member’s that are interested in this role to apply!

Before your employer brings you back into the workplace?

Before an employer re-opens a workplace in full, they must first ensure that it is permissible to do so as per the contemporaneous public health advice, in line with the The Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business found here [click here](#). In advance of opening they **must adhere to the requirements and measures** of The Return to Work Safety Protocol - [click here](#). Fórsa have produced a comprehensive guide to understanding these documents that can be read in full [here](#).

These measure may include but are not limited to the below:

- Employers to provide a COVID-19 induction training for all workers upon their return to work.
- Appoint at least one Lead Worker Representative (Covid-19), The number of worker representatives for COVID-19 appointed will, ideally, be proportionate to the number of workers in the workplace and this person should be clearly identifiable in the workplace.
- Develop or update existing business and safety plans including the Covid-19 Response Plan, Risk Assessments and Safety Statements. Communicate these to staff
- Conduct a Covid-19 Individual Risk Assessment for staff who have indicated they are 'At Risk' or 'Vulnerable'
- Arrange for the putting in place of control measures as identified within Risk Assessments to minimize risk of infection. These may include but are not limited to: the provision of adequate PPE, installations of Perspex Screens at public counters, Deep Cleaning / Sanitizing of work areas, Clear hand hygiene protocols, availability of hot water and other items as identified as Control measures in the Risk Assessments

The unions' position on "Deep Cleaning" is that it is a specialised task requiring expertise.

Employers should not attempt to redeploy members to carryout deep cleaning where this is outside their area of expertise. This is particularly relevant to the Schools sector.

Employee Obligations:

Before an employee returns to work, they should familiarize themselves with their obligations under the Return to Work Safely Protocol [click here](#). These obligations may include but are not limited to the points below:

- Complete and return the Return to Work Form (this should be supplied within 3 days of your expected return to the workplace)
- Inform your Principal if there are other circumstances relating to covid-19 (e.g. if you are in the 'at risk' category) which may need to be disclosed for your safe return to work
- Participate in induction training provided on your return to the workplace
- Complete Temperature Testing requirements
- Follow all hygiene measures i.e. handwashing and respiratory etiquette
- If you show symptoms at work, report immediately to the designated manager
- Keep your workspace (desk and computer) clean with disinfectants provided by your employer

If you are in doubt at any stage contact your local workplace rep, or Fórsa directly at <https://www.forsa.ie/contact/>

Protect yourself, join your union online now - [click here](#)