



Archaeologists

COVID-19 Working Advice

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Introduction

With the removal of all COVID-19 related legal restrictions on personal freedoms, the UK governments are expecting the public to make informed decisions in managing the risks posed by Coronavirus. With less than 50%¹ of the UK population fully vaccinated, and transmission rates expected to reach 100,000 cases per day we recommend that archaeological employers continue to implement enhanced procedures and solutions in their places of work until September, allowing as many employees as possible to be fully vaccinated.

This guidance offers advice for producing Safe Systems of Work (SSOW) and risk assessing archaeological work during the COVID-19 epidemic. Each workforce, company and site will have different requirements, and differing restrictions may apply in parts of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The Department of Health & Social Care (DHSC) and regional Public Health agencies (PHE for England, PHS for Scotland, PHW for Wales and HSCNI for Northern Ireland) are leading the UK government response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

England: www.gov.uk/coronavirus.

Scotland: www.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/

Wales: www.gov.wales/coronavirus

Northern Ireland www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/coronavirus-covid-19

The HSE (HSNI in Northern Ireland) is the relevant enforcing authority for Government guidelines. If a site is not consistently implementing the measures set out by regional UK or regional governments, it may be subject to enforcement action.

PHE guidance for construction states “where it is not possible to follow the social distancing guidelines in full in relation to a particular activity, you should consider whether that activity needs to continue for the site to continue to operate, and, if so, take all the mitigating actions possible to reduce the risk of transmission”.

The health and safety requirements of any construction activity must not be compromised at this time. If an activity cannot be undertaken safely, it should not take place.

Organisations must have in place effective arrangements for monitoring and reviewing their compliance with Government guidance, and this document will be under constant review.

The government Test and Trace app could be used however nobody should feel compelled to use the app. If members are comfortable and able to do so we encourage the use the app and for employers to display the necessary posters at their sites/offices. You must isolate if you have been in close contact with someone who tests positive.

The government defines close contact as:

- anyone who lives in the same household as someone with COVID-19 symptoms or who has tested positive for COVID-19
- anyone who has had any of the following types of contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 with a PCR test:
 - face-to-face contact including having a face-to-face conversation within

¹ <https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/details/vaccinations> (accessed 06/07/2021)

- one metre
- been within one metre for one minute or longer without face-to-face contact
- sexual contacts
- been within 2 metres of someone for more than 15 minutes (either as a one-off contact, or added up together over one day)
- travelled in the same vehicle or a plane

Planning archaeological works

Are you planning or undertaking archaeological work during COVID-19? There are key points where you need to stop and ask yourself, and colleagues, the following questions:

Planning travel or site work

- Does your risk assessment cover COVID-19 specific hazard controls?
- Does your risk assessment cover travel, site, welfare and accommodation?
- Do you have a Safe System of Work (SSOW) in place for site tasks during COVID-19?
- Have you considered any variations in restrictions, such as local lockdowns or those in other countries?
- Have you considered how temperature and weather may affect work?
- Have you considered the mental health of the people undertaking the work?
- Have you considered the effect to friends or family they live with?
- If not undertaking the work yourself, would you be happy to do what you are asking?
- Have you consulted with your staff or union reps?
- Have you considered what mitigations or PPE may be suitable to minimise the risk of transmission?

Prior to travel or site work

- Have you been given a copy of your employers COVID-19 RAMS & SSOW with enough time prior to travel or commencement of work to read it, and been given the facility to ask questions or raise concerns?
- Are the Principal Contractors / contractors RAMS or SSOW available on site for all to read?
- Have you been made aware of reporting procedures for issues, and provided with written reassurance you will not be victimised or bullied for raising legitimate concerns?
- When being deployed to site has your mental health been considered?
- When being deployed to site has the effect on anyone you live with been considered?

Beginning travel or site work

- Have you received all site briefings, and are the relevant COVID-19 information displayed on site for reference?
- Can you see that the RAMS and SSOW are being adhered to?
- Are all the welfare, PPE & hygiene provisions in place?
- Are RA's and SSOW being continually reviewed and communicated on site?

If you can't answer positively to these questions, work should not commence. Raise the issue with your supervisor, manager, H&S manager or union rep.

Archaeological site work

- **2m distances should be maintained to limit the spread of COVID-19.** 1m+ should only be considered where either in case of emergency, or where the risks associated with maintaining 2m distance are greater than the risks associated with COVID-19.
- If 1m+ is being considered, a dynamic risk assessment should be completed in consultation with staff, and employers should provide robust controls for risks (e.g. FFP3 face coverings).
- Equipment such as tools, pens, pencils, clipboards and PPE to be allocated to each staff member and not shared. Labelling or cleaning after use may be necessary.
- Equipment such as phones, tablets, cameras, survey kit etc, should be cleaned after each use or allocated to only one member of the site team.
- Ideally only one person per site will be responsible for dealing with paper archives, such as taking out numbers from registers, and each staff member given their own supply of record sheets or folders should be cleaned after each use. Digital recording (GPS, tablet context capture) will negate the need for paper records and sharing of recording equipment.
- Storage and manual handling of items such as finds and samples will need to be carefully planned.
- Avoid taking equipment or site files into the home or office unless thoroughly cleaned or quarantined in line with latest advice.
- High risk activities should be considered carefully. For example, confined spaces work, excavation with risk of services strike, UXO or contamination. Emergency plans need to take into consideration the risk posed to the public, those who may need to be on site to monitor / fix any issues and the extra strain an incident could place on emergency services during COVID-19.
- Site briefings should adhere to social distancing and be conducted outside. The use of technology can control this risk e.g. sending briefing via email with read receipts.
- Site meetings and visitors should be limited or happen via video call.
- Plans should be made for site down time (e.g. bad weather or waiting for attendance). If there is no need for archaeological attendance staff should not be expected to wait on site.
- Consider the increase or decrease in risk due to weather e.g. the virus can survive longer on surfaces in cold temperatures than hot temperatures.
- Movement of staff between sites should be limited.
- Sites should be regularly inspected by the H&S manager (and H&S union rep if in place).
- If smaller teams are used make sure work pressures are not increased (e.g. expecting staff to do more or asking for lone working) and archaeological standards should not suffer.
- Plans should be made for **socially distanced training**.
- Staff should be provided with a clear instruction on how to raise issues or concerns.

Travel & accommodation

- Staff should not be asked to travel, work or stay where social distancing cannot be maintained. This can create elevated health (both mental and physical) risks for those living but not working together. It also increases numbers who need to self-isolate should an individual test positive for COVID-19.
- All travel and accommodation needs to be risk assessed and 3rd party company COVID-19 procedures made available to staff.
- No away work should be completed unless individual accommodation can be provided, or a safe system designed to maintain distancing and cleaning routines. This should be done in consultation with staff and providing robust controls for risks.
- Travel should avoid public transport if possible, or arrangements made for travel outside of peak time. This may require staggered start/finish times and should be arranged in consultation with staff.
- Individuals should only travel when **2m distances** can be maintained e.g. in individual vehicles, unless individuals live together, or 1m+ mitigations are in place.
- Movement of staff between sites, vehicles and accommodation should be limited.
- All vehicles should be cleaned before and after use if not sole use. Attention should be paid to door handles, steering wheels, buttons, gear sticks and interior surfaces. Cleaning time is considered work time.
- Any extra expenses for cleaning of vehicles or accommodation, or time for travel or cleaning should be factored into the working day and budgets.
- Rest breaks on long journeys need to be planned to make sure services are open, and staff can maintain social distancing.
- Gloves should be worn for refuelling.
- Emergency or breakdown procedures need to be reviewed to make sure they are adequate.
- 1m + should only be considered where necessary, e.g. to bring back to work a non-driving member of staff. If less than 2m distances are to be considered, this should be done in consultation with staff and employers should ensure robust controls for risks e.g. a **maximum of 6 people** per vehicle, limit travel times, enhanced cleaning, fitted screens in vehicles, face coverings (e.g. FFP3 masks).
- If 1m+ is implemented, an action plan should be designed in consultation with staff in case of infection and isolation. If staff are exposed at work and are required to isolate we would expect individuals to receive full pay.

Welfare

- There should be enough welfare for everyone to use safely and it should comply with HSE standards and/or CDM regulations.
- **2m to be maintained in welfare areas**, or the number of users should be limited, with cleaning between uses. If there are larger canteens mark out 2m spaces.
- Face coverings should be worn in canteens where food is served, except when seated at a table to eat or drink, as per [government guidance on restaurants](#).
- Space out changing facilities and consider marking changing zones 2m apart. Do not share pegs, lockers, benches. Make sure everyone has their own space. If this cannot be maintained limit entry.
- Mark out 2m spaces between urinals, wash basins and toilet cubicles. If this cannot be maintained limit entry.
- Make sure there is sufficient space in walkways, car parks, entrances etc to allow **2m distances**.
- Site offices must be organised to allow **2m distancing**.
- FFP3 masks should be considered as mitigation in enclosed rooms with more than one person.
- Staggered start times or break times may be required to facilitate the above.
- Numbers of individuals entering smoking areas should be limited to maintain 2m distances.
- Provision needs to be made to allow hand washing (or use alcohol gel) before entering a vehicle, after arriving on site, before entering the welfare cabin and after using the toilet.
- Welfare should be thoroughly cleaned once a day, with localised cleaning after each use and/or before each break, including surfaces, toilets, door handles, light switches, generator buttons, kettles, microwave buttons/handles.
- There should be no sharing of food or drinks.
- Shared cups/cutlery/crockery should be thoroughly cleaned between uses.
- Sufficient stocks of cleaning products should be maintained. Any extra products you buy for cleaning at work can be expensed to the employer.
- Registers should be maintained to document cleaning regimes.
- Consider the increase or decrease in risk due to wet weather in humid drying rooms or cabins with re-circulated air may increase the spread of the virus.
- Make sure there is enough welfare for all to use in wet or cold weather. Use of vehicles as welfare is not adequate for projects longer than a few days.

Office and Lab work

- Working from home should be considered where possible.
- Home workplaces may require a Display Screen Equipment (DSE) assessment. It is your employer's responsibility to mitigate risks related to DSE, as far as is practically possible.
- Workplaces must be organised to allow **2m distances, to limit the spread of COVID-19**. 1m+ should only be considered where either in case of emergency, or where the risks associated with maintaining 2m distance are greater than the risks associated with COVID-19.
- Numbers of individuals entering buildings should be limited to help maintain **2m distances**.
- If 1m+ is being considered, a dynamic risk assessment should be completed in consultation with staff, and employers should provide robust controls for risks.
- Movement around buildings should be limited. One-way/ give way routes and permanently open doors (where fire safety allows) should be considered to reduce contact when moving around buildings.
- Use of lifts should be restricted.
- Face masks (e.g. FFP3) should be considered as mitigation for multiple occupancy in enclosed rooms or corridors.
- Staggered start times or break times should be considered to allow for safer travel and reduced chances of COVID-19 transmission.
- Provision should be made to allow hand washing (or use alcohol gel) before entering a building.
- Workplaces should be adequately ventilated, either utilising natural or mechanical ventilation, in accordance with HSE guidance (<https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/equipment-and-machinery/air-conditioning-and-ventilation/index.htm>)
- Desks etc. should be cleaned after each use (where 'hot-desking' is utilised) or allocated to only one member of staff, either permanently or for the duration of their time working in the office or lab.
- Communal spaces thoroughly cleaned once a day, with particular attention paid to touch points including; surfaces, toilets, door handles, switches, kettles, microwave buttons/handles.
- Ideally only one person per project should be responsible for dealing with any paper archives. Digital recording (GPS, tablet context capture) will negate the need for creating and handling paper records.
- Storage and manual handling of items, such as lab equipment, finds and samples should be carefully planned.
- Meetings and visitors should be limited or happen via video call.
- Offices and labs should be regularly inspected by the H&S manager (and H&S union rep if in place).
- Plans should be made for **socially distanced training**.
- Staff should be provided with a clear instruction on how to raise issues or concerns.

Emergency Procedures

- All first aiders should be briefed on the updated instructions from St Johns Ambulance <https://www.sja.org.uk/get-advice/first-aid-advice/covid-19-advice-for-first-aiders/>
- First aid kits should be checked and updated. Masks & gloves should be available with the kit. It is also recommended the first aid kit contains a towel for CPR <https://www.resus.org.uk/media/statements/resuscitation-council-uk-statements-on-covid-19-coronavirus-cpr-and-resuscitation/covid-community/>
- A provision for mental health support, such as Mental Health First Aiders and/or Employee Assistance Programmes should be available for staff.
- **Emergency details should be checked and updated, some A&E departments and walk in centres have closed.**
- No one should attend site if they are unwell. Plans should be made and communicated to staff for how people will leave site should they become unwell.
- As there may be fewer staff available, and it may take longer to mobilise replacements, contingency plans should be made ahead of time if staff are not able to attend site.
- Advice and procedures should be reviewed for emergency vehicle break downs or accidents.
- Increased emergency service response times should be factored into any rescue plan.
- High risk activities should be thoroughly assessed and only completed if necessary eg working in confined spaces or with high risk of UXO
- Procedures and advice should be provided to staff should they face comment, criticism or conflict about being at work.
- Lone working procedures should be in place if staff are working remotely.
- Site evacuation procedures should still adhere to the 2m social distancing rules and should be communicated to all staff. Assembly points should be placed in an area large enough to accommodate this.
- Staff should make sure their company has up to date contact details for themselves and next of kin.
- If staff fall ill and believe they contracted COVID-19 on site, they must report this immediately.
- Testing should be made available to staff as an added mitigation for the risk of COVID. This could be provided by the archaeological employer, the Principal Contractor, or by supporting individuals to attend local authority testing.

PCR tests: <https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test>

Lateral Flow tests: <https://www.gov.uk/find-covid-19-lateral-flow-test-site>

Adverse Weather Precautions

While there is no definitive evidence that COVID-19 spreads more easily in adverse weather, a recent observational study² has suggested that temperatures below 25°C and low humidity may increase the severity of the symptoms. Conditions such as these can dry out the protective mucosal membranes in the mouth, nose and throat. The Prospect Archaeologists' Branch therefore suggests that both members and their employers pay special attention to the following during periods of bad weather:

- Welfare: Is there adequate space for everyone to change, dry clothes and take breaks, while maintaining a social distance of 2m (or 1m+ with robust controls for the increased risk of transmission)? Use of vehicles as welfare is not adequate for projects longer than a few days.
- Food & Drink: Is there adequate provision for water, and for storing and heating food and drink (e.g. fridge/ kettle/ microwave)
- Temperature and ventilation: Can the welfare be kept above 25°C, without losing too much humidity? Can this be measured and controlled? Avoid using air conditioning systems that re-circulate air.
- Social distancing: If 1m+ measures have been introduced, consider temporarily reverting to 2m, where possible.
- PPE: Is wet PPE drying overnight? If not, can extra sets of PPE be provided, to allow drying during the working day?
- Mental Health: Winter can be a tough time for mental health and measures to deal with Coronavirus might exacerbate underlying conditions. Remember to look after your mental health, and encourage others to do the same.
- Sickness: Do not go to sites or offices if you are experiencing the symptoms of Coronavirus. Call in sick, or work from home if possible and **get tested**: <https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test>

² <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.07.11.20147157v2>

Reporting issues

If at any time you do not feel safe or are confident all practical controls are being undertaken to protect staff wellbeing and safety then you must raise it.

The following is our suggested order of raising issues:

- Talk to your supervisor, line manager or project manager immediately, or the site manager. Suggest a solution to the issue you have raised. Follow this up with an email so the concern is in writing.

If a concern is not addressed:

- Talk to your company H&S manager
- Talk to your union rep or H&S staff committee member

If the concern is still not addressed:

- Raise the issue with the national Archaeologist branch officer, Diggers Forum, CIFA or BAJR.
- Contact the CIFA whistleblowing hotline
<https://www.archaeologists.net/membership/pcaw>
- Raise the issue with the HSE <https://www.hse.gov.uk/contact/index.htm>
- To provide information on unsafe working and a lack of social distancing on construction sites you can contact UNITE call 0207 622 2442 or email construction@unitetheunion.org

Dealing with outbreaks

If two or more cases are identified in a workplace, employers should follow Government advice on reporting and containing, which can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reporting-outbreaks-of-coronavirus-covid-19>

Government advice on COVID must still be adhered to, even if you have had both vaccination shots: however, the advice may vary.