

Is your organisation prepared for a second COVID wave?

Health leaders have suggested a second wave of coronavirus infections could occur in the winter. The recent rapid increase in reported infections and subsequent R number impact suggests that we are on the brink of a second wave – which will almost certainly be further affected by the seasonal flu virus.

What could the impact be?

There is no doubt that a second wave is a scary prospect for businesses. This could mean another lockdown, which means you'd once again be forced to shut. Staff could need to work from home. And, measures taken at the start of the year to facilitate homeworking will need to be repeated. The furlough scheme is set to be wound down until October. The Government have been clear that they won't extend it further. This means businesses may lose this financial help if a second lockdown was to take place. It seems likely that, in a second wave, the government will not provide as much assistance as they previously have. Instead, a focus on "localised lockdowns" seems to be the preferred option.

A continued rise in infection rates could threaten your plans to get back to normal. Particularly if your business was shut through the duration of the lockdown. So, it is vital that all employers work to prevent a second wave, but also prepare for what they will do if one was to take place. Hope for the best, plan for the worst.

How can I help prevent a second wave?

To help tackle the likelihood of this, organisations are being asked by the Government to:

- avoid face to face seating arrangements in the office by changing office layouts where applicable
- reduce the number of employees in enclosed spaces
- improve ventilation or ensure ventilation systems are working as they should
- set up protective screens and provide face coverings – eg face masks or shields
- put in place rules for managing social spaces – eg one person in a small kitchen at a time (or more, depending on the size of said kitchen space)
- provide hand sanitisers and surface cleaning wipes
- promote regular hand washing
- allow staff to work from home if it's possible for them to do so. Or, change shift patterns to reduce the number of staff on duty at any given time.

Localised lockdowns: an indicator of the future?

With infection rates nearly double in certain parts of the country, reports indicate that we may well be at the start of a second wave. However, there have been reports of second waves in other countries. The US is a prime example. They hit their peak number of cases in mid-April. Afterwards,

that number began to drop. Towards the end of June, the number of cases began to rise again, surpassing the figure in April – which is very similar to what we are seeing in the UK. On a smaller scale, there have been reports of localised coronavirus outbreaks in several countries—including the UK.

Localised lockdowns can relate to towns and cities such as Blackburn and Leicester. But it can also refer to single buildings. For example, a meat processing plant in Wales has found that almost 160 of its employees have been diagnosed with the coronavirus. This has brought into question the working conditions at the plant and production has since been halted.

Councils have also been given the authority to introduce “lightning” local lockdowns. Further indication that we’re likely to see sudden, quick lockdowns on a smaller scale.

The situation in Leicester. The incident at the meat processing plant. These are clear examples of what could happen if cases spike once again across the UK. Do your part to reduce the risk—follow proper procedures.