

Home Working and Display Screen Equipment (DSE) during COVID-19

Factsheet



YOUR DISPLAY SCREEN EQUIPMENT (DSE) REQUIREMENTS AS A HOME WORKER, AND THE RELEVANT LEGISLATION

The need for a factsheet

The coronavirus pandemic shifted various work practices, one of which was a transition for individuals from working in an office environment to working from home. While this was not specific to any industry, and can occur across any industry, [it was more likely to be relevant for those in the industrial sectors](#). These include information and communication, professional, scientific and technical activities, financial and insurance activities, and real estate activities. These sectors reflect mainly those who work in offices and are required to use appropriate hardware and software equipment, as part of their work roles. These types of equipment, display screen equipment (DSE), include personal computers (PCs), laptops, tablets and smartphones. However, this sudden change meant that millions of workers had to work from home with limited time to make the necessary adjustments to their home situation to ensure it was suitable and functional as a workspace.

While there has been a gradual increase in those workers who work from home, from [4.3% in 2015 to 5.1% at the end of 2019](#), this percentage increased from March 2020 due to the United Kingdom's government guidelines on work practices to manage COVID-19. By April 2020, [46.6% of people in employment did some work at home](#), with 86.0% doing so due to COVID-19.

Defining homeworking

Home workers can be considered as [those who homework occasionally \(ad-hoc\)](#), [those who homework regularly \(50% of time\)](#), or [those who homework permanently \(100% of time\)](#). Any adjustment in employees' work patterns have to be agreed with the organisation. COVID-19 made many employees permanent home workers, which was needed, and could be considered an agreement in principle between employees and their respective organisations.

The support that is required when working from home

Employees who are asked to work from home have to be supported to do so. Many employers will have working at home policies, which may reflect one or all three of the definitions of home working, as described, and include how to support employees, inclusive of:

- Carrying out a risk assessment to include
 - ▶ Suitability of the employee's home for homeworking
 - ▶ Putting in place any reasonable adjustment that the employee requires
- Providing DSE training
 - ▶ Outlining the risks associated with using DSE
 - ▶ Ensuring appropriate and safe working practices to prevent DSE related health problems
- Maintaining equipment as needed and purchasing new equipment when required
- [Policies should consider other ways the organisation can support the worker:](#)
 - ▶ Perhaps, paying for an employee's broadband or supplying paper for a printer
 - ▶ Contributing to electricity, gas, telephone bills
- Those employees who work from home on a regular or permanent basis should ensure they [check their home insurance and mortgage policies](#) about specific clauses that cover working from home or not
- Outlining flexible / non-flexible working, which should cover employees' flexibility on how they work or if they are restricted to core hours
- [Clearly stating the arrangements](#) for storing, using and securing confidential data held at workers' home, with the employer opting to provide a locked cabinet, or appropriate online secure storage, e.g. cloud. Employees have to ensure all data are protected
- Maintaining clear and informative communication about the organisation – updates, events, changes
- [Providing support systems](#) to address feelings of isolation, loneliness and helplessness

Negative impact if appropriate systems and training are not in place

On the individual

- Eyestrain, visual fatigue, musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), work-related stress, work-related anxiety, work-related fatigue, increase in sickness absence, increase in presenteeism

On the organisation

- Increase in sickness absence, increase in presenteeism, reduced productivity, reduced performance, lower morale, lower trust in organisation

Needed actions when working from home

Managers should:

- encourage reasonable and frequent contact between team members throughout the working day
- ensure that work outputs and processes are clearly discussed and agreed
- support social connections to occur and to be sustained - recreate the usual workplace social bonds
- send out clear meeting etiquette guidelines

Organisations have to reduce and eliminate **virtual-connection fatigue**, which is the constant and continuous interaction with technology to hold meetings, attend training, connect socially.

- Meetings should be planned to allow at least ten minutes between meetings
- Formal lunch breaks should be established and not disrupted
- Ensure morning and afternoon breaks are built into workers' daily routines
- Home workers should take physical activity breaks away from work to avoid orthopaedic issues and assist in improving wellbeing

Top tips when working from home

Take sufficient breaks - every 20 minutes look away from the screen

- Maintain good posture when seated
- [Adjust work chairs, screens, keyboard, etc. as needed](#)
 - ▶ Ensure a comfortable work posture
 - ▶ Able to read information on the screen without straining eyes
- Position screen to avoid reflections and glare
- Maintain a daily routine, likely to include similar working hours as the office
- Designate a work area, free from household distractions
- Clearly distinguish a boundary between working times and other household activities
- Remain responsible for achieving a healthy sleeping pattern
- Identify any issues early and maintain good liaison with your colleagues and manager
- Clear communication of expectations from managers

Figure 1 shows the appropriate posture and alignment when working with display screen equipment. Those working from home should try to achieve this as closely as possible to maintain their physical and mental health.



Figure 1. Source: HSE. <https://www.hsl.gov.uk/dse-assessments-and-healthy-working>

Relevant legislation

Employees and employers have legal responsibilities to ensure a safe and healthy work environment, as it pertains to the use of DSE, whether they are in their normal workplace or working from home. These responsibilities are covered under the [Health and Safety at Work etc, Act \(1974\)](#), the [Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations \(1999\)](#) and the [Health and Safety \(Display Screen Equipment\) Regulations 1992](#), as amended by the [Health and Safety \(Miscellaneous Amendments\) Regulations 2002](#).

Employers have an overall duty of care to their employees under Section 2 of the Health and Safety at Work Act (1974). Regulation 3 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 requires them to undertake general risk assessments to identify any risks to the health and safety of their staff and others who may be affected by their work process. If a worker regularly uses a computer, including laptops, then the DSE Regulations apply as they could be at risk of developing eye fatigue and/or MSDs from extensive use of this equipment. If workers use DSE daily, as part of their normal work, continuously for an hour or more, employers must do a workstation assessment.

Further information

Chartered Institute of Ergonomics & Human Factors (CIEHF). Home working and staying healthy. <https://www.ergonomics.org.uk/common/Uploaded%20files/Publications/CIEHF-Working-from-Home-Infographic.pdf>

GOV.UK. Claim tax relief for your job expenses. Working from home. <https://www.gov.uk/tax-relief-for-employees/working-at-home>

Health and Safety Executive. Protect home workers. <https://www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/workers/home.htm>

Health and Safety Executive. Working safely with display screen equipment. Overview. <https://www.hse.gov.uk/msd/dse/>

Health and Safety Executive. Working safely with display screen equipment. Home working. <https://www.hse.gov.uk/msd/dse/home-working.htm#long>

Kinman, G., et al. (2020). Working from home. <https://www.bps.org.uk/sites/www.bps.org.uk/files/Policy/Policy%20-%20Files/Working%20from%20home.pdf>

Munar, L. Practical tips to make home-based telework as healthy, safe and effective as possible. European Agency for Safety and Health at Work. https://oshwiki.eu/wiki/Practical_tips_to_make_home-based_telework_as_healthy_safe_and_effective_as_possible

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Content compiled by Dr Roxane L. Gervais, Christine Poulter, Professor Anne Harriss, Professor Neil Greenberg, Professor Gail Kinman

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