

Aviation and Rail: Returning to Work in the COVID-19 Era

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History books will forever record 2020 as the year of COVID-19. What has arguably been one of the worst pandemics since the Spanish flu has held the entire world hostage to lockdown and fear. The virus has taken many lives and devastated countless businesses. The full economic impact will not be known for years.

With countries gradually reopening, business owners and corporate leaders are looking for any sort of direction about how to proceed. The British government has offered only limited advice thus far. Business owners are being encouraged to make their own decisions on how to get employees back to work and keep them safe.

Nowhere is the lack of in-depth guidance more troubling than in the travel sector. Both aviation and passenger rail have been hard hit by the economic impacts of COVID-19. How operators proceed will dictate how quickly and effectively recovery takes place.

Workers Returning Amid Mounting Losses

Workers returning to airports and rail depots does not mean the COVID-19 crisis has fully passed. Indeed, workers are returning to their jobs even in the midst of mounting losses. Commercial aviation is on pace to realise a [97% reduction](#) in passenger flights for 2020. Furthermore, experts expect that it will take some time for travellers to be comfortable enough to fly even when the pandemic is declared under control.

Things are much better for passenger rail. The British government has spent some £3.5 billion to [keep trains running](#) during the pandemic. The cash infusion was necessary to make up for lack of passengers. Running nearly empty trains is a clear indication that people are afraid to travel by rail.

Transport workers returning to their jobs are already under enough stress from the poor economics. They do not need additional stress over their own safety. As such, employers need to step up and take whatever steps are necessary to ensure worker safety and make team members feel comfortable about returning.

Before Bringing Workers Back

In mid-July Prime Minister Boris Johnson [stated his intention](#) to see the country mostly reopened by August 1. He walked back on his remarks a few weeks later while also announcing the postponement of some plans to ease lockdown restrictions. As a result, official government guidance dealing with workplace safety have been updated.

We recommend companies ask and answer the following three questions before bringing employees back:

1. **Is their presence essential?** Many people continue to work from home. It might be wise to allow them to continue doing so if their physical presence in the office is not essential.
2. **Is the workplace safe?** If a workplace cannot be made reasonably safe, bringing employees back might not be a wise option right now.

3. **Are workers willing to come back?** It is vital that employers and employees both agree with the need to return to work. Flexibility is the key operating word on both sides.

The Governments 5 Steps to Safety

Government officials have published some guidance to help employers figure out what to do. Among that guidance is the government's [5 steps to working safely](#). Those steps are as follows:

- **Conduct Risk Assessments** – Airport, rail operators, and others are being urged to carry out a COVID-19 risk assessment commensurate with official [HSE guidance](#). Risks should be reduced as much as possible by taking preventative measures in order of priority.
- **Develop Hygiene Procedures** – Operators should develop comprehensive hygiene procedures that cover everything from cleaning workspaces to regular handwashing. Additional [handwashing hygiene guidance](#) is available from the NHS.
- **Facilitate Working from Home** – Where possible, employers are being urged to help people continue working from home. This includes discussing work arrangements, providing the necessary equipment, etc.
- **Maintain Social Distancing** – Where possible, employees should be encouraged to maintain social distancing of at least 2m. Employers can assist by posting signs, marking areas on the floor with tape, urging one-way traffic, etc.
- **Manage Transmission Risks** – Where social distancing is not possible, operators are being urged to manage transmission risks. Suggestions include installing physical barriers and staggering arrival and departure times

Coronavirus Testing in the Workplace

We encourage all aviation and rail operators to embrace regular coronavirus testing in the workplace. As long as coronavirus infection is a risk in the UK, the health and well-being of employees and customers alike should be at the forefront of every employer's response. Testing is a big part of that response.

Testing is essential to the success of the UK's contact tracing system. Unfortunately, there are some issues with NHS testing at the current time. For example, a recent study out of the University of Bristol suggests that as many as [20% of the tests](#) coming back false could actually be positive.

In addition, a BBC report suggests that government reporting [may be flawed](#). The government has been challenged about the way it collects and presents NHS testing data.

Testing with CityDoc Kits

Again, testing is necessary in order for our contact-tracing systems to work effectively. Accurate testing can also help people make better decisions about returning to work. Testing is the only way we can effectively monitor infection levels which ultimately inform government decisions.

CityDoc has been at the forefront of private coronavirus testing since the start of the pandemic. We offer both PCR and antigen saliva COVID-19 testing for your workplace. Our tests are non-invasive and easy to self-administer. Results are available within 24 hours of samples reaching our lab.

Given that your employees could be testing every few days, we believe that saliva testing is far superior to oral and nasal swabs. Our tests are also suitable for everyone, regardless of age.

COVID-19 will be with us for the foreseeable future. As the UK attempts to return to some semblance of normalcy, we run the risk of a new wave of infections. We believe one of the best ways to stay ahead of the virus is to provide regular, private testing along with following all government guidance.

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