

## **'Return to the Workplace – working safely during the Covid-19 Pandemic' guide – September 2021**

### **Introduction**

COVID-19 continues to present many challenges for the CCG, however the safety and welfare of our staff remains our overriding priority.

This document outlines the CCG's response to a number of key objectives, and demonstrates our continued support of maintaining a COVID-19 secure workplace during the pandemic. It also sets out our continued approach to minimising the risks across all of the CCG office sites.

This document also introduces our future way of working; a blended model of both home and office working.

### **COVID-19 risk assessments**

#### **Objective: To carry out a risk assessment that includes the risk of COVID-19**

An NCL CCG workplace risk assessment has been completed, covering each of the NCL office sites; this has been recently refreshed. This workplace risk assessment can be found on the new 'Return to Office Working' intranet page {LINK HERE}

#### **Objective: To reduce risk to the lowest reasonably practicable level by taking preventative measures**

As an employer, we have a duty to take reasonably practical steps to manage risks in our workplace. As we start to encourage staff to work in a more blended model, of both home and office working, we will support staff to start to attend our office sites where appropriate and safe to do so.

#### **Objective: To support a safe return to the workplace**

Whilst the government is no longer instructing people to work from home if they can, we as a CCG remain supportive of our staff continuing to work from home. However, we are now starting to consider how we can return, in part, to office working, to achieve a blended model of home and office working.

During this period of high prevalence, the government has recommended a gradual return to office working. We will ensure that any change to home and office working is gradual and well managed. Staff should not feel pressured into returning to office working.

We will continue to ensure that all the CCG office sites are safe and we will continue to work to reduce the risks to staff in our office sites.

### **Protecting people who are at higher risk**

#### **Objective: To support those staff who are at a higher risk of infection and/or an adverse outcome if infected**

There are some groups who are at higher risk of severe illness from coronavirus. Further detail can be found here: [who is at higher risk](#) and [protecting people who are clinically extremely vulnerable](#).

We ask **ALL** staff to complete the HR 'Return to Office Working Conversation' document; this gives you an opportunity to discuss any mental and physical health difficulties you may be facing with your line manager. All completed documents should be sent to HR.

The HR 'Return to Office Working Conversation' document **must** be completed before you attend any office site, even if for a short period of time, such as collecting IT equipment or post.

## **Mental health and wellbeing**

### **Objective: To ensure that staff have access to mental health and wellbeing support**

We are mindful that the pandemic is having an impact on everyone's lives, and that you may feel low, worried, anxious, or be concerned about your health or that of those close to you.

Everyone reacts differently to events and changes in the way that we think, feel and behave vary between different people and over time. It's important that you take care of your mind as well as your body.

### **Consider how you can connect with others**

Maintaining relationships with people you trust is important for your mental wellbeing. If you can't meet in person, think about how you can stay in touch with friends and family via telephone, video calls or social media instead – whether it's people you normally see often or connecting with old friends. The [NHS Volunteer Responders](#) can also provide a free telephone 'check in and chat' if you are feeling isolated. Please call 0808 196 3646 to register for this service.

### **Talk about your worries**

It is quite common to feel worried, scared or helpless about the current situation. Remember that this is a difficult time for everyone and sharing with family and friends how you are feeling and the things you are doing to cope can help them too. If you don't feel able to do that, there are people you can speak to via [NHS recommended helplines](#).

### **Look after your physical wellbeing**

Your physical health has a big impact on how you are feeling emotionally and mentally. At times like these, it can be easy to fall into unhealthy patterns of behaviour which, in turn, can make you feel worse. Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals and drink enough water. Visit [One You](#) for advice on improving your health and wellbeing, including ideas for [healthy meals you can cook at home](#).

Be physically active. Doing exercise and other physical activity can have a positive impact on your mood, improve your sleep, and reduce stress and anxiety. There are lots of easy ways to get moving like walking or gardening. If you can't exercise outside, you can find free, easy [10-minute workouts](#) from Public Health England (PHE) or other exercise videos to try at home on the [NHS Fitness Studio](#).

## Try to manage difficult feelings

Many people find the news about COVID-19 concerning. However, some people may experience such intense anxiety that it becomes a problem. Try to focus on the things you can control, such as managing your media and information intake – 24-hour news and constant social media updates can make you feel more worried. If it is affecting you, try to limit the time you spend watching, reading, or listening to media coverage of the pandemic. It may help to only check the news at set times or limiting yourself to checking a couple of times a day.

The Every Mind Matters page on [anxiety](#) and [NHS mental wellbeing audio guides](#) provide further information on how to manage anxiety.

## Take time to relax and focus on the present

This can help with difficult emotions, worries about the future and generally make you feel better. Relaxation techniques can also help some people to deal with feelings of anxiety. For useful resources, see [Every Mind Matters](#) and the [NHS mindfulness page](#).

The CCG has Mindfulness sessions for staff every Wednesday and Friday – please contact [nclccg.communications@nhs.net](mailto:nclccg.communications@nhs.net) to take part.

## Where to get help for your mental health

If you are experiencing stress, feelings of anxiety or low mood, you can visit the [NHS mental health and wellbeing page](#) for self-assessment, audio guides and practical tools. [Every Mind Matters](#) also provides simple tips and advice to start taking better care of your mental health.

If it is affecting your daily life, contact [NHS 111](#) or speak to your GP. NHS mental health services remain open. You can find further information on how to [access mental health services](#) and search [what is available in your area](#). Support is also available through the mental health charities.

If you need help for a mental health crisis, emergency or breakdown, you should get immediate expert advice and assessment. Visit [NHS.UK to find out where to get urgent help for mental health](#). In a medical emergency, [call 999](#). This is when someone is seriously ill or injured and their life is at risk. A mental health emergency should be taken as seriously as a physical health emergency.

## People who need to self-isolate

**Objective: To stop people physically coming to work, when they're legally required to stay home.**

This includes people who:

- have tested positive for COVID-19
- have COVID-19 symptoms
- live in a household with someone who has symptoms, unless they're [exempt from self-isolation](#)
- have been told to self-isolate by [NHS Test and Trace](#)

## People who are exempt from self-isolation

People who are fully vaccinated or under 18 years 6 months old do not need to self-isolate if they've had close contact with someone who has COVID-19. If they get any COVID-19 symptoms, they should self-isolate immediately and [get a PCR test](#).

All CCG staff are able to work from home, and staff will not be asked to work in the office, if there is a requirement for them to self-isolate – if staff require additional equipment to support working from home, such as a screen, keyboard, mouse, chair or footrest, they should contact the Business Services Team to discuss further.

### **Returning to office working**

#### **Objective: To make sure all CCG staff understand COVID-19 related safety procedures**

We have created a new dedicated 'Return to Office Working' page on the Intranet {LINK HERE}, so staff can readily access the information they need in regards to visiting the CCG offices safely, as well as other information such as on lateral flow tests. This intranet page will be updated regularly.

Staff also have access to the latest information via the staff bulletin and the Directorate briefings.

#### **Objective: Ensure that CCG staff are able to socially distance wherever possible. This includes when staff arrive at and leave work, while they are in work, and when they travel between CCG sites**

Whilst the government advice no longer requires people to social distance, each of our NCL office sites does still support social distancing, in both the layout of the office and the spacing out of desks. We are keen to approach any changes gradually and with caution.

Across the NCL CCG office sites, every desk has been clearly marked out, indicating whether the desk can or cannot be used, in order to ensure staff can space out when working in the office.

Areas which tend to be busier, like kitchens and toilets, have additional signage reminding staff about social distancing.

Please take account of staff with protected characteristics, as social distancing may not be possible or will be more challenging for staff with certain disabilities. For example, individuals in wheelchairs or with visual impairments. Line managers will be having conversations with staff regarding what reasonable adjustments can be made to the workplace so they can work safely.

There is currently a one-way system in place at both Laycock Street and 250 Euston Road; please follow the signs that are displayed in the office and adhere to the one-way system. North London Business Park does not have a one-way system in place as the banks of desks are sufficiently spaced out.

### **Using technology in the office**

#### **Objective: To ensure that technology supports staff to work effectively at both home and the office**

NCL CCG staff have access to MS Teams, which allows staff to dial in remotely to meetings, chat with and call colleagues.

The desks at each of the NCL office sites have docking stations and some have monitors and keyboards for staff to dock their laptops into and work. For staff who do not wish to use monitors, desks are available for docking purposes only. All types of desks can be booked through our e-booking system 'DeskSmart'.

Headsets are available for staff to use in the office. Please ensure that you do not share headsets; please either take the headset home with you or store in a locker. Requests for a headset can be made via the Business Services Team at [nclccg.businessservices@nhs.net](mailto:nclccg.businessservices@nhs.net).

Staff should not remove or take equipment from the desks; if staff need additional equipment for home working, they should notify the Business Services Team at [nclccg.businessservices@nhs.net](mailto:nclccg.businessservices@nhs.net) who will advise on availability and provide the equipment needed, if appropriate.

If staff experience any technical IT issues with laptops or phones (or with internet connection whilst in the office), this must be raised with IT directly at [nelcsu.itservicedeskangila@nhs.net](mailto:nelcsu.itservicedeskangila@nhs.net) or call 020 3049 0611, rather than the Business Services Team.

### **Coming to work and leaving work**

We continue to encourage all CCG staff to:

- Stagger arrival and departure times at work. This will reduce the likelihood of staff all arriving and leaving at the same time.
- Cycle, walk or drive to the CCG office sites; car parking is provided at North London Business Park and Laycock Street.
  - Laycock Street has bike racks and staff can access a secure bike shed. A key to be bike shed can be requested via the Business Services team at: [nclccg.businessservices@nhs.net](mailto:nclccg.businessservices@nhs.net)
  - 250 Euston Road also has a secure bike shed and when requesting your ID badge, you can ask for access to the bike shed to be included.
  - North London Business Park has seven bike racks available in the car park, behind Building 3 and a bike shed for 14 bikes, which is situated next to the car park, behind Building 2.
- Use the lockers provided in the office at North London Business Park if you wish to change clothes or make use of the showers
- Follow all COVID-19 health and safety guidance and signage in the CCG offices including the one-way system at both Laycock Street and 250 Euston Road
- Use the handwashing facilities and/or the hand sanitiser stations on arrival at any of the CCG office sites
- Clean your ID badges and swipe cards regularly and hold your swipe cards next to swipe readers, rather than touching them.

### **Moving around buildings and worksites**

**Objective: To maintain social-distancing wherever possible, while people move around the building.**

We continue to encourage all CCG staff to:

- Reduce movement by avoiding non-essential trips within the building and sites
- To use the stairs wherever you can. If you need to use the lifts, please be mindful of the maximum occupancy for the lifts, and use hand sanitizer after leaving the lift

## **Workplaces and workstations**

**Objective: To support CCG staff to socially distance when they are at a desk or meeting space/room, wherever possible.**

As part of the 'Return to Office Working' preparation, we have reviewed each of the NCL CCG office layouts and processes to support staff to work further apart from each other, if staff chose to. Every desk has been clearly marked out, indicating whether the desk can or cannot be used, in order to ensure staff can be spaced out when working in the office.

Floor tape and 'do not use' stickers have been used to mark areas to support staff in socially distancing where they choose to.

Through using the e-booking system 'DeskSmart', occupancy levels will be monitored, to help support social distancing as there are a limited number of desks, meeting spaces and rooms that can be used at any one time.

Hot desks and spaces can be used by staff, where they feel comfortable in doing so. We encourage staff to clean and sanitize the area before and afterwards, using the antibacterial wipes and hand sanitizer which is provided in all CCG office sites.

## **Meetings**

**Objective: To reduce transmission due to face-to-face meetings**

Whilst we continue to encourage staff to use MS Teams and dial into meetings remotely where possible, we recognise that some meetings are better done face to face, such as appraisals and 121s. We are therefore asking staff to consider the most appropriate way to undertake the meeting, and chose the most suitable location, whether this be in the office or at home.

Staff are asked to avoid transmission during meetings caused by sharing objects. For example, staff should not share pens or documents. Hand sanitizer has been provided in all meeting rooms for staff to use.

If meetings in person are required, use rooms where there is good ventilation. Please ensure that windows and doors are opened as fully as possible before the meeting to maximise the ventilation in the room.

Staff are asked to not use large meeting rooms if holding 1:1s but to use smaller meeting rooms within the office. This will allow the larger meeting to be used for people who are holding larger meetings and maintain social distancing where they choose to.

## **Accidents, security and other incidents**

**Objective: To prioritise safety during incidents**

All staff have a duty to report incidents or near misses. If there is an incident, an accident or a near miss, please inform your line manager and the Business Services team at [nclccg.businessservices@nhs.net](mailto:nclccg.businessservices@nhs.net) immediately. Please then refer to the process as outlined in the "Non-clinical incident and Near Miss reporting Policy and Procedure" (found on the Intranet

<https://intranet.northcentrallondonccg.nhs.uk/downloads/HR%20policies/NCL%20CCG%20Non-clinical%20incident%20and%20Near%20Miss%20reporting%20Policy%20and%20Procedure>

[Clinical%20Incident%20Near%20Miss%20Reporting%20Policy%20and%20Procedure.pdf](#)  
and complete the incident form.

## **Ventilation**

**Objective: To use ventilation to mitigate the risk of aerosol spread of COVID-19 in enclosed spaces**

Good ventilation brings fresh or cleaned air into indoor spaces. The more fresh air that is brought inside, the more diluted any airborne virus will become. In poorly ventilated spaces, residual virus can remain in the air after an infected person has left and increase the risk of COVID-19 spreading.

We encourage staff to maximise the supply of fresh air in our office sites. You can help do this through:

- fully or partially opening windows, air vents and doors to improve natural ventilation
- if mechanical ventilation is available, ensure that the system is set to maximise fresh air and minimise air recirculation. Maximising the amount of fresh air your system draws in or ensuring additional fresh air will help avoid COVID-19 spreading

We are encouraging staff to use outside space where practical; there is outside seating available at North London Business Park, in the courtyard, which staff are welcome to use.

We are encouraging staff to improve the natural ventilation in each of the CCG offices by fully or partially opening windows, air vents and doors. Please do not prop fire doors open. It is important not to close windows or doors completely when people are using or occupying a naturally ventilated area. This can result in very low levels of ventilation.

Airing rooms as frequently as you can also improves ventilation. Open all the doors and windows fully to maximise the ventilation in a room. It may be better to do this when the room is unoccupied.

## **Reducing contact for staff**

From Step 4 of the Roadmap, the government have said that social distancing guidance no longer applies and there are no limits on social contact between people from different households. COVID-19 can still be spread through social contact. We can, however, mitigate this risk by reducing the number of people you come into contact with, by:

- reducing the number of people you have contact with by using 'fixed teams or partnering' or 'cohorting' (so each person works with only a few others)
- reviewing office layouts, or using back-to-back or side-to-side working, instead of face-to-face

Line managers should take account of those with protected characteristics and discuss with any disabled members of their team, what reasonable adjustments can be made to the office space, so they can work safely and effectively.

**Objective: To reduce contact between people when they're at their workplaces and workstations, if possible.**

Hand sanitizer stations have been installed in each of the NCL office sites. In addition to this, hand sanitizer is available at the end of each bank of desks. Anti-bacterial wipes are available in all of the offices for staff to wipe desks and keyboards before and after using the space.

If you notice that stocks are low, please contact the Business Services team at [nclccg.businessservices@nhs.net](mailto:nclccg.businessservices@nhs.net).

The cleaners have been asked to pay particular attention to surfaces that people touch regularly. This includes door handles and keyboards. Desks and meeting rooms/spaces are cleaned at the end of each working day.

### **Cleaning the workplace**

**Objective: To make sure any CCG office that has been closed or only partially open is clean and ready for staff to return**

Ahead of the recent 'return to office working' trial in July, each of the office sites was deep cleaned. In addition to this, and with the expectation that there will be increased numbers of staff in the office during September, we have contacted our cleaning suppliers, and have agreed that the frequency of offices cleans per week will increase.

North London Business Park, Laycock Street, Holbrook House and 250 Euston Road, are cleaned on a daily basis. Please note, that as of 07 September 2021, River Park House is temporarily closed.

The cleaners have been asked to pay particular attention to surfaces that people touch regularly. This includes door handles and keyboards. Desks and meeting rooms/spaces are cleaned at the end of each working day.

**Objective: To keep the workplace clean and the spread of COVID-19 from touching contaminated surfaces**

Hand sanitizer stations have been installed in each of the NCL office sites. In addition to this, hand sanitizer is available at the end of each bank of desks. Anti-bacterial wipes are available in all of the offices for staff to wipe desks and keyboards before and after using the space.

If you notice that stocks are low, please contact the Business Services team at [nclccg.businessservices@nhs.net](mailto:nclccg.businessservices@nhs.net).

Staff are asked to clear workspaces and remove waste and all belongings, including any stationery, cutlery and paperwork from the work area when they are finished working for the day. Extra non-recycling bins have been provided for staff, and visitors, to dispose of any single use face coverings if required.

Signage reminding staff of the importance of regular hand washing has also been put up in each of the office sites.

**Objective: To help everyone keep good hygiene throughout the working day**

Each of the NCL CCG offices displays signs and posters to remind staff:

- how to wash your hands well
- that you should wash your hands frequently
- that you should not touch your face

As mentioned previously, hand sanitizer stations have been installed in each of the NCL office sites. In addition to this, hand sanitizer is available at the end of each bank of desks. Antibacterial wipes are available in all of the offices for staff to wipe desks and keyboards when required.

### **Face coverings at work**

A face covering is something which safely covers your mouth and nose.

**Face coverings are no longer required by law.** However, the government expects and recommends that people continue to wear face coverings in crowded, enclosed spaces. Where worn correctly, this may reduce the risk of transmission to themselves and others.

We, as a CCG, continue to support any of our staff if they chose to wear a face covering within the office. Please be mindful that face coverings may make it harder to communicate with people who rely on lip reading, facial expressions and clear sound.

If you choose to wear a face covering, the CCG will support you in using face coverings safely. This means encouraging you to:

- wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser before putting on face coverings. You should also do this before and after removing them
- avoid touching your face or face coverings. Otherwise you could contaminate them with germs from your hands
- change your face coverings if they become damp or you have touched them
- continue to wash your hands regularly
- change or wash your face coverings daily
- if the material is washable, to wash it in line with manufacturer's instructions. If it's not washable, to dispose of it carefully in waste bins provided

### **Outbreaks in the workplace**

**Objective: To provide guidance if there is a COVID-19 outbreak in your workplace.**

On the 'Return to Office Working' Intranet page, there is the 'NCL CCG COVID-19 Workplace Exposure' process map, which outlines the steps that need to be taken if a member of staff becomes unwell with symptoms of COVID-19 or tests positive for COVID-19.

### **Work related travel**

**Objective: To avoid unnecessary work related travel. To keep people safe when they do need to travel between CCG offices and locations**

If you are required to travel as part of your role, we are encouraging staff to walk or cycle wherever possible. When not possible, you can use public transport or drive. You must wear a face covering when using public transport.

Staff parking is available at both North London Business Park and Laycock Street CCG offices.

North London Business Park has 60+ spaces available to NCL CCG staff. If you would like to park there, please contact the Business Services Team at [nlccg.businessservices@nhs.net](mailto:nlccg.businessservices@nhs.net)

to arrange collection of a parking permit, before using the e-booking system, DeskSmart, to pre-book a space.

Please note that Laycock Street has three parking spaces available. These parking spaces are not able to be booked via DeskSmart - you must email the Business Services Team at [nclccg.businessservices@nhs.net](mailto:nclccg.businessservices@nhs.net) with your vehicle registration number to book a space. No permit is needed.

### **NHS Test and Trace**

Each of the NCL office sites displays the official NHS Test and Trace posters on the walls, for staff to check into the office via the NHS QR code using the NHS COVID-19 app. This will enable NHS Test and Trace to identify and warn people who may have been exposed to COVID-19.

If 2 or more people test positive for COVID-19 and have been in a venue on the same day, then other people who registered their attendance at the venue on that day will receive a notification with the necessary public health advice. This notification will either come from their NHS COVID-19 app if they checked in using the NHS QR code, or via a text message if they provided their phone number.

The e-booking system 'DeskSmart' will also record staff attendance at each of the office sites, as staff make booking for desks and meeting rooms/spaces.

Staff who are expecting visitors should ensure guests do not attend if they are showing symptoms of COVID-19 or if have been advised to self-isolate due to an alert from Test and Trace.

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