

Federation of Master Builders (FMB) Guidance Note

Restarting Building Work



Introduction

This guidance sets out advice to members and their clients about what steps they may want to think about when starting or restarting a building project during the coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis.

The guidance is based on three principles:

- 1. Protecting health and safety** – members of the FMB are committed to protecting the health and safety of their workers, workers' families, clients, their supply chains, and the public.
- 2. Supporting the building industry** – members of the FMB must be supported in a way that recognises their important contribution to the UK economy. Coming out of the coronavirus crisis we will need a robust construction sector that can deliver on the Government's objectives to build more homes, improve the quality and energy efficiency of our building stock, and provide the infrastructure to enable the UK to compete.
- 3. Promoting best practice** – members of the FMB and their clients need to be adhering to best practice to ensure all building work is done to the highest standards and within a safe environment.

As always, all activity should be underpinned by open communication and collaboration.

This guidance is aimed at members working in the domestic sector where most building work stopped during the early stage of the coronavirus crisis, following UK Government advice that only 'essential' work should be carried out in peoples' homes.

Work on larger sites, on new build developments, and work on empty buildings should be carried out in accordance with [the Construction Leadership Council's Site Operating Procedures](#), which are based on Public Health England advice. [Construction guidance has been produced for Scotland](#). Other restrictions and advice may apply in [Wales](#) and [Northern Ireland](#) (note, advice is site location specific, not guided by where you are based as a builder).

This guidance is not exhaustive, and Government advice is being continually updated. You should check official sources of information before making any decisions about how to proceed, and you should keep the situation under review. There are links to that advice throughout this document.

It is likely that any decision to (re)start work will be informed by a mixture of Government direction and the judgement of individual businesses. **What we are setting out in this note is a framework to help businesses prepare for that moment.** We recognise the importance of clear messaging from Government to members and to the public, and we will continue to push for this on your behalf.

FMB members also have access to our specialist advisors. Please visit www.fmb.org.uk/members or call **0330 333 7777** for further information.



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1. Deciding when to restart building work: What are the rules where I live?

We know that FMB members' and their clients' experiences of the lockdown have differed by location and by the nature of the building project. These [flow-charts](#) summarise the current advice to assist members across the UK in making the decision to close or re-open a site.

At the time of publication, most construction projects in Scotland have been deemed [non-essential](#) and may not re-open until the [guidance](#) from the Scottish Government changes. This guidance is subject to regular reviews.

In Wales, the advice is to [take all reasonable measures](#) to ensure that a distance of two metres is maintained between anyone on the site where possible and practical. This can be enforced through penalties (fines). This restriction is subject to regular reviews.

In England and Northern Ireland, before you (re)start work please make sure you read and can comply with the [Site Operating Procedures](#), which reflect the [Public Health England guidelines](#) for [construction](#). These are most likely to apply to larger sites where clients are not in residence. For domestic work carried out in people's homes, the FMB's guidance to members has matched that of the UK Government, and been [limited to essential repairs and maintenance](#).

In advance of official advice changing, we know that you will be thinking about what you should do to prepare for the return to work. What follows is a set of steps to consider to help you and your clients be in the best position to do so safely.

1.1 Who cannot return to work?

If you, a member of your workforce or any contractors working for you, meet any one of the following criteria, they **cannot** return to work:

- If you/they are [experiencing coronavirus symptoms](#), however mild including a high temperature or persistent cough.
- If you/they are considered to be a vulnerable person due to age, underlying health or clinical condition or if they are pregnant.
- If you/they are living with someone who is self-isolating or a vulnerable person.

2. Contracts, finances and insurance

Before you (re)start work you will need to:

2.1 Assess whether you can meet your contractual requirements

Liaise with your suppliers and workers to check whether they are able to meet your requirements. The FMB contracts are based on the parties working together on a project, and that includes finding solutions to this unexpected and unpredictable situation. You will need to cooperate with your clients, staff, suppliers and subcontractors.

2.2 Agree any necessary contract changes

Agree any changes to your FMB contract on the works period or completion date, price for the works, quality of materials due to limited supplies, working hours or



methods to reflect the requirements above and remobilisation costs. These should be recorded in writing and signed by both parties using the FMB *Change of Works Form* (available through the [Members' Area](#)). Other forms of contract will have similar mechanisms for dealing with changes.

2.3 Establish understanding about the uncertainty of the current climate

Ensure your client understands the uncertain nature of works and that you have recorded any assumptions that are reflected in your revised date, price, quality, or other statements. FMB members can contact the FMB Dispute Resolution Team for advice if they are unable to reach agreement with their client.

2.4 Plan for future restrictions

Communicate with your client what you will both do in the event that future restrictions are placed on the works or your site that may prevent works being carried out or cause further changes to the time, cost or quality you have listed in your changes.

2.5 Keep talking

Continue to communicate clearly, openly and regularly as the situation is still changing. You should *inform your clients of any unforeseen problems or delays as early as possible and discuss how these affect your clients' aims for the project. You should do this remotely in order to maintain social distancing.*

2.6 Check your insurance

You should have notified your insurer that you were stopping work, and you will also need to notify them that work has restarted. Specifically:

- *Notifying Liability Insurers once work has restarted:* All cover that may have been amended or reduced while the site was closed will need to be reinstated to ensure you are properly covered for the work you are doing. Cover for your employees will similarly need to be reinstated if it has been amended.
- *Notify Professional Indemnity Insurers* of your intention to go back to work.
- *Warranties for domestic work:* Notify your insurer that you are recommencing work and the new estimated completion date. If the specification of work has changed, you will need to submit this to the insurer in writing to ensure that the new works/materials are covered.
- *New homes insurance:* If the work is a new homes site, you will need to confirm any new or amended specifications and will need to confirm any anticipated completion dates if these have changed so that any onsite inspections can be rearranged to fit the new construction timetable.

2.7 Keep your lender informed

You may need to notify your bank if you have obtained funding to finance the project.

2.8 Update your site health and safety guidance and make sure your workers understand it

You will likely need to update your existing health and safety processes on site to

ensure you and your workforce are compliant with updated guidance. You should communicate any changes in procedures to your workforce and employees should be asked to acknowledge in writing that they have read and understood the new guidance. These records should be kept so that in the event of an insurance claim you can prove everyone on site acted within the guidance available at the time.



3. Carrying out building work inside people's homes

If you are going to return to work, what precautions can you take to protect yourself, your workers and clients?

3.1 Communication and planning the work

- **If either party becomes unwell:** Clients have a responsibility to inform their builder if they or any other occupant at the property become unwell, and vice-versa, so that the risk of spreading the virus can be minimised. Do not delay in passing on information if anyone begins to show symptoms or has been in contact with others who have the virus and follow the official advice about self-isolation.
 - [General health advice for individuals](#) is available on the NHS website.
 - [Information about the Government's response](#), including latest announcements, advice on social distancing, and its action plan is available on their website.
 - You can also consult the [111 Coronavirus Service online](#).
- **Your health and your workers' health:** No work should be carried out by any tradesperson who is showing coronavirus symptoms, however mild. No worker should be pressurised into coming to work if they have concerns about risks to their own health or that of family members. Please see item 2.8 above with regards to updated health and safety guidance. Make sure to look out for your workers at this time. Further support is available via the [Lighthouse Club Construction Industry Helpline](#).
- **Apply for a test for coronavirus if you display symptoms:** As a construction worker whose work cannot be done at home, you and your household are now eligible to apply to have a coronavirus test if you are displaying symptoms. Go to the Government's website to [find out how to arrange for a test](#). Eligibility for a test could vary in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- **Call ahead each day to check the health of the household:** Call ahead on the day each day you intend to be on site to check that no one in the household has started to show symptoms of the virus, has been diagnosed, or is self-isolating.

No work should be carried out in households which are self-isolating, are shielded, or are showing coronavirus symptoms **unless it is to remedy a direct risk to the household, such as emergency plumbing, heating or electrical repairs, or other safety risk, and where the tradesperson is willing to do so, taking all possible precautions.** See [Government advice on vulnerable groups](#).



- **Carry out a risk assessment:** As the builder, you should undertake a risk assessment of the situation, including discussing any concerns from workers and clients. It is vital that the risk involved in each job is assessed and documented, and that key considerations around health and welfare are the primary concerns for any work you undertake. Please see item 2.8 above with regards to updated health and safety guidance and ensuring your workforce has confirmed in writing that they understand any changes.
- **Maintaining your reputation:** It is important that neighbours and other third parties who are aware that work is restarting on a domestic site are informed that the work is being carried out in accordance with official guidance on safe operations. This will help to safeguard your reputation as a responsible contractor for the future.
- **Avoid unnecessary face-to-face contact:** You and your clients should communicate as much as possible via phone, email and video call, in order to minimise meetings and all face-to-face contact, including any signing of documents or provision of certificates. Remember not to shake hands, this is often instinctive.
- **Stick to all health and safety regulations:** Ensure your client and you as principal contractor are complying with your respective [obligations](#) on the health, safety and welfare of anyone on the site under the CDM Regulations.

3.2 Travelling to work

- **Only travel with members of your household and avoid public transport:** Workers should use individual modes of transport and should not travel together to site in the same vehicle unless they already happen to be part of the same household. Public transport should be avoided. If this is not possible, consider staggered start times so that busy times can be avoided, and social distancing maintained.

3.3 Carrying out the work

- **Daily briefings:** Carry out daily briefings with your workers to remind them of the additional health and safety measures that they must follow. Maintain a zero tolerance to breaches of the rules you put in place for this purpose.
- **Nominate a coordinator to track reports of illness:** Identify a coronavirus coordinator, who will be responsible for keeping records of who is on site and when, and any reports of illness or breaches of the guidance. Make workers aware that they should report any concerns to that individual.
- **Keep a record:** Keep a written record of measures that have been taken to comply with safety guidance on site, from the day you return to site and on a daily basis thereafter.



- **Separate building work from residents of the home:** If the part of the home that you are working in can be divided off from the rest of the house, leaving the clients in residence with sufficient kitchen and bathroom facilities, this will enable any work to be carried out whilst still observing social distancing. Where this is not possible, residents should stay in a different room with the door closed. Keep rooms well ventilated at all times.
- **Washing facilities and common areas:** Separate washing facilities should also be arranged where possible. You are responsible for ensuring that paper towels are provided, along with hot water and soap. Whilst on site, continue to follow the advice on frequent hand washing when not wearing gloves, using hand sanitiser and not touching the face.

Only establish common areas for refreshments and breaks if absolutely necessary. If common areas are needed, they should be cleaned regularly at least twice a day. Examples of items that should be regularly disinfected are door handles, ladders, taps, and toilets. This list is not exhaustive, and you should conduct your own risk assessment to identify areas of heavy use.

- **Keep two metres apart, and wear full PPE if not possible:** The Government's recommendation of keeping two metres apart should be applied stringently. You must take all reasonable measures to abide by this. However, we know that it is not possible for some tasks to be carried out whilst observing this rule, for example, lifting a heavy window into its frame. Whenever this is the case, any time spent closer than two metres must be kept to an absolute minimum and personal protective equipment (PPE), including face masks, should be used to provide a level of protection.
- **Using personal protective equipment:** On small sites with confined spaces, consider use of PPE such as face masks, gloves and safety glasses for the whole time you are on site, rather than only the time when they are necessary during dust-producing tasks, for example. Disposable equipment should be used if at all possible. The Health and Safety Executive has issued [advice on using facemasks](#) to avoid transmission of coronavirus.

The FMB is aware that PPE is currently in short supply, and that there are concerns about costs. We have made it clear to Government that we expect clear and swift action from them to address this. If you are unable to find PPE at any point, you will need to carry out a risk assessment before going ahead with a job, and leave that task until you do have the correct PPE.

- **Washing your clothes:** Any clothing worn on site should be changed as soon as you get home and washed so as not to harbour viruses. Any re-useable PPE (e.g. safety glasses) should be washed. Any wipes, disposable gloves etc should be bagged up and disposed of in accordance with local waste regulations. Check your Local Authority website for information on waste disposal. The Construction Industry Council has produced [a video](#) which includes information about this.



- **Don't share:** Tools must not be shared between workers. If this is not possible, tools should be disinfected before and after use by one person, before passing them on to another worker. Under no circumstances should PPE, including facemasks be shared. Note that sharing mobile phones/tablets/pens etc may risk infection.
- **Keep a tidy site:** Good housekeeping and keeping a safe, tidy site is even more important than usual. Tools and equipment should be cleaned and disinfected, at the start and finish of any job, and all materials left tidily. There is information on the Government website about [cleaning workspaces](#), but nothing specific to construction sites.
- **Take a break – alone:** Workers should take their breaks separately, for example eating lunch in their own vehicles or well away from each other. Consider staggered break times.
- **Splitting shifts if possible:** Consider using a split shift pattern or compartmentalising sites between identified crews of workers who work inside their own compartment area to minimise physical proximity between workers.
- **Accepting deliveries:** Maintain social distancing when accepting deliveries, for example by requesting electronic copies of delivery notes.
- **No visitors to site:** Do not allow any non-essential visitors to access the site. Any visitors or inspectors who must be allowed access should follow all of the same rules as the workers on site.

3.4 What to do if anyone on the site shows signs of illness

- **The first principle to apply is that health concerns take precedence over any other issue.**
- **Do not continue work if you show signs of coronavirus:** If at any time a worker on site feels unwell, they should assess how to leave whatever they are working on in a safe state, contact their employer, and leave the site that day. Employers should make sure that workers are regularly reminded of this, and it should be clear to workers that they must not continue to work whilst showing any symptoms, or if they have been in contact with another person who has.
- **Your responsibility to report coronavirus cases:** Understand your obligations to [report any coronavirus cases arising from your project to the HSE under RIDDOR](#) and [follow all other HSE Guidance](#).
- **Next steps if coronavirus symptoms are displayed on site:** If a worker, client or anyone who is on site shows symptoms of coronavirus, you should make a risk assessment and consider whether the site should be closed down. Workers who have been in contact with them should self-isolate, [following the PHE Guidance](#).



- **Communicate changes to costs or length of project:** Taking the actions above will be very likely to cause further delays and increase project costs, so again a collaborative approach between clients, builders and supply chain will achieve the best outcome.
- **Keep a record:** Keep written records of any of the above actions, including dates, times and names, which will be important for contact tracing.

4. Notes for consumers

- **Beware of rogue traders:** The coronavirus crisis has unfortunately created conditions where fraudsters and people who are not skilled or professional builders will seize the opportunity to make money from homeowners who want to get work completed. If you are approached by anyone offering to finish work quickly and cheaply, be very careful of this. Trading Standards are reporting increased levels of such activity. It is better to be patient than to risk using rogue builders. Please [use the FMB's Find A Builder service](#) for an independently vetted Master Builder company in your area.
- **Don't complete the work yourself:** Consumers should not be tempted to complete any work themselves, other than the normal finishing tasks such as painting and decorating. Consumers should definitely not attempt to do any work on gas and electricity installations, which should only be carried out by qualified and accredited individuals. Consult [Electrical Safety First](#) or [Gas Safe](#) for further details.
- **Don't put pressure on your builder:** Consumers should not pressurise their builder to cut corners in relation to protecting health and safety in order to get their building project completed. It is highly likely that working in accordance with current coronavirus guidance, which is over and above the existing health and safety law, will mean that building projects take longer to complete, and will therefore cost more. This requires collaborative and open discussion between the parties to agree a plan to get the work completed safely.
- **Don't be a victim of cyber-crime:** Builder and client should keep in touch remotely, so that everyone is updated on how things are going and any likelihood of work resuming. Unfortunately, there has been a rise in cyber-crime, particularly criminals hacking into email accounts in order to re-direct payments to the attackers' bank account. Everyone should be very careful about payments going to the right account, and perhaps make a test payment of a small sum first, ensuring it has gone to the right place before transferring any large amounts. Make sure your anti-virus computer software is up to date, and do not click on links from unknown sources. [The National Cyber Security Centre](#) website has more advice.
- **Do be prepared to work collaboratively:** Please work collaboratively with your builder and be realistic about likely delays to the work. This is the best way to get your project safely and successfully completed.

- **Reassure your neighbours:** They may have concerns about the building work continuing, so you should reassure them that this is being done in accordance with FMB safety guidance.



Disclaimer

Official advice is changing daily, and this list is not exhaustive, so you should check official sources of information before making any decisions about how to proceed and keep the situation under review. This document offers general guidance only. FMB members can contact our advisors for help with a specific enquiry. The advisory helpline numbers are on the Members' Area accessible at www.fmb.org.uk/members.

Contact details

For further information please visit the FMB's [coronavirus advice pages](#).
Call the FMB on 0330 333 7777, or email membership@fmb.org.uk.