

## White Paper

# COVID-19 recovery step by step – what does it mean for those managing buildings?

March 2021



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Step 1 of the Government's "roadmap to recovery" began this week with outdoor exercise/recreation permitted with one other person, and primary and secondary schools reopening, although, some schools have been open and operating with essential worker and other children since January 2021.

Subject to passing the "four tests", there are another three milestone dates published - notwithstanding the second stage to step one, where on the 29th March, the rule of 6 outdoors is re-introduced and outdoor parent/child groups of up to 15 can again begin.

Prior to the introduction of Step 2, the Government is indicating, "the 'stay at home' rule will end on 29th March 2021, but many restrictions will remain in place. People should continue to work from home where they can and minimise the number of journeys they make where possible, avoiding travel at the busiest times and routes."

The steps below consider the proposed changes to restrictions and some of the activities you should be considering. Please note, with the different routes to recovery being adopted by the different administrations in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, the timelines and changes could vary.

## Step 2 - possibly from the 12th April 2021

During Step 2, "Travel abroad will continue to be prohibited, other than for a small number of permitted reasons. Holidays abroad will not be allowed, given it will remain important to manage the risk of imported variants and protect the vaccination programme. The government has launched a new taskforce to review global travel which will report on 12th April 2021."

Subject to confirmation, Step 2 should see:

- Non-essential shops and personal care premises return to business;
- Libraries, community centres, gyms, indoor leisure and outdoor attractions (i.e. zoos, theme parks and drive in cinemas) reopen;
- Indoor children's activities resume; and
- Restaurants and pub gardens reopen and serve customers sitting outdoors (there will be



no need for customers to order a substantial meal with the purchase of alcoholic drinks). For any business re-opening COVID-19 secure procedures will need to be in place for staff and customers. In addition, examples of further actions should include:

- Reviewing your COVID-19 risk assessment and subsequent COVID-19 control measures so they are up to date and remains relevant to any new or changed activities.
- Risk assessments covering fire, Legionella and general health and safety will need to be reviewed, and updated as needed, to reflect any changed or new activities;
- Procedures covering any emergency evacuations and first aiders will need to be reviewed and updated, as needed, to reflect any changes;
- Any items of equipment requiring statutory inspection should be reviewed and as necessary inspected to ensure they can still be used safely; and
- Especially with premises serving food, a review of pest control and as required any cleaning prior to re-opening should be undertaken.

If any of these types of premises form part of your building (as an occupier or tenant) you should be seeking reassurance from each organisation that they have and effective return to work process in place. You may wish to contact them in advance to seek such assurance, remind them of their responsibilities and the requirements to cooperate and communicate, particularly if there have been significant changes to the operation or activities.

You should also be identifying and communicating any COVID-19 processes or other changes you may have introduced, in for example common areas, as well as any revised or updated procedures/reporting on security, fire evacuation, etc. with your staff and others returning to work in your building.

Air quality and ventilation have been critical systems over the pandemic. Both employees and tenants (where your supplies are shared) are likely to be looking for reassurance that these systems are operating safely and effectively.



### Step 3 – at least five weeks after the introduction of Step 2, so possibly from the 17th May 2021.

During Step 3, “the government will look to continue easing limits on seeing friends and family wherever possible, allowing people to decide on the appropriate level of risk for their circumstances.”

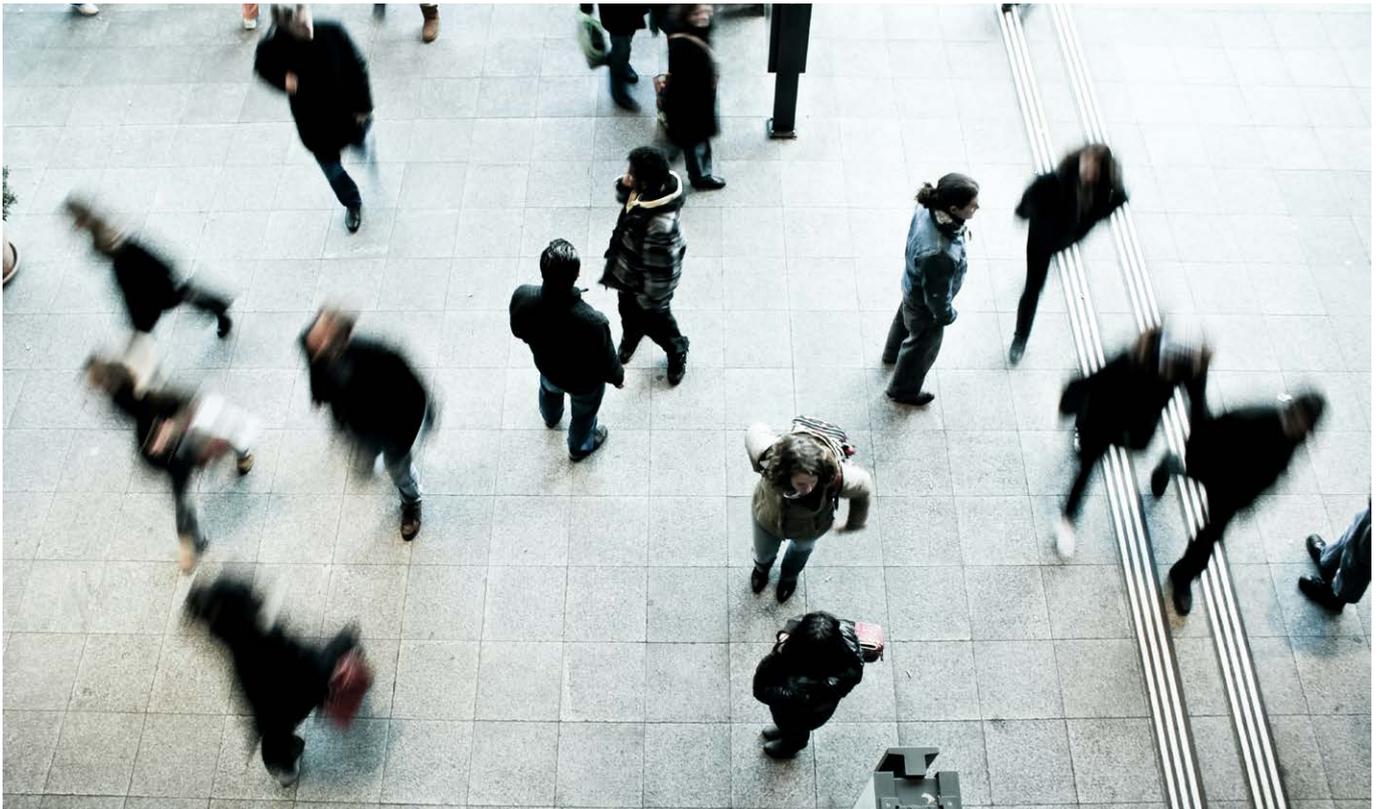
It is also expected that, “most businesses in all but the highest risk sectors will be able to reopen. In all sectors, COVID-Secure guidance will remain in place and businesses may not cater for groups bigger than the legal limits.”

Subject to confirmation, Step 3 should see:

- Indoor entertainment/attractions and any remaining outdoor entertainment reopen (depending on the venue and capacity);
- Organised indoor adult sport resume;
- A review of international travel (The government’s Global Travel Taskforce will reconvene to issue a report by 12 April 2021);
- A 30-person limit outdoors and the rule of 6 or two households can meet indoors; and
- Remaining accommodation to open and domestic overnight stays allowed.

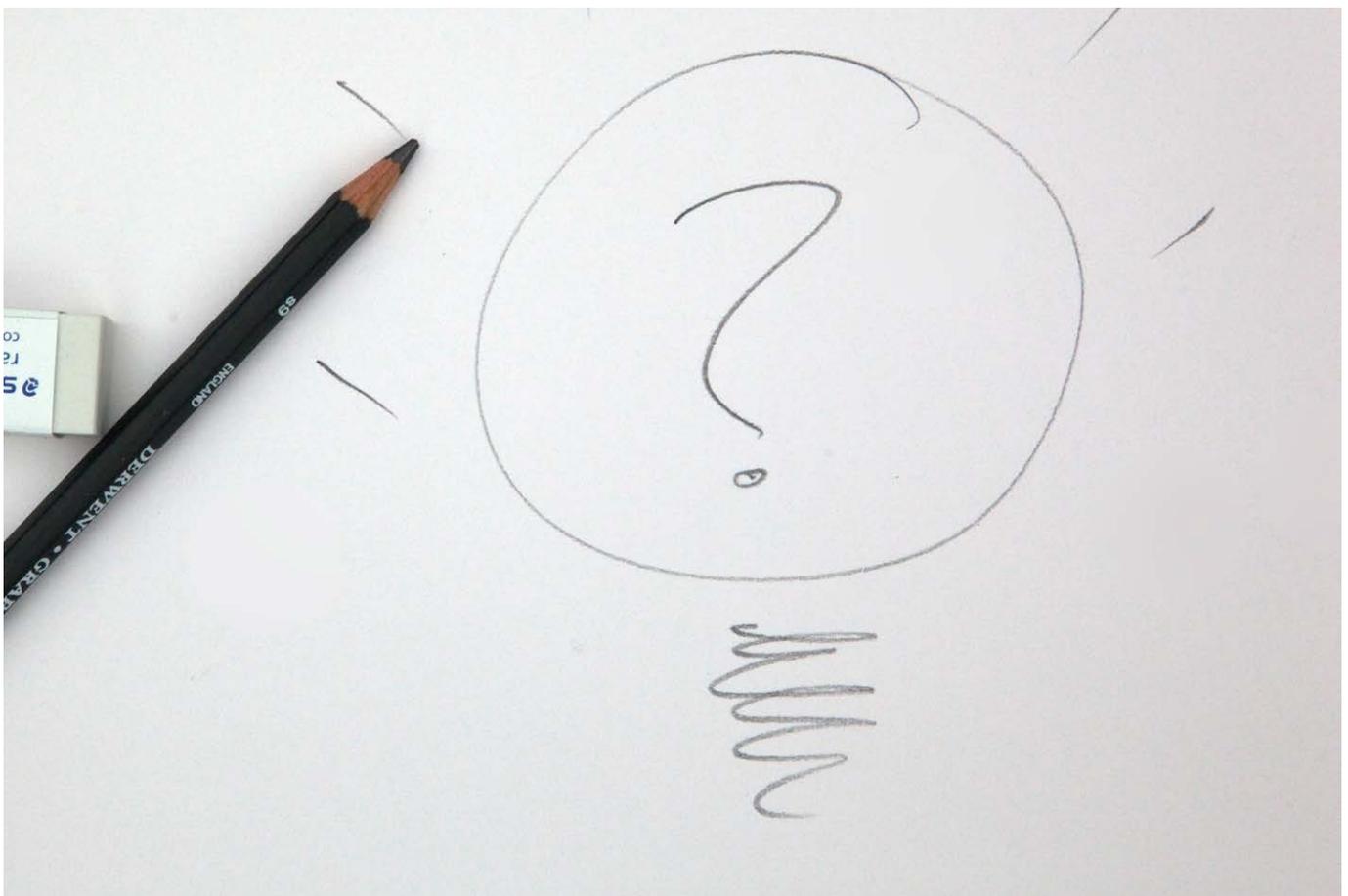
With further organisations starting to return to work, for them (and those responsible for the buildings they may occupy), the outlined points to consider for Step 2 will remain relevant.

Anecdotally it appears most organisations will not be looking to return large numbers of staff to more office-based workplaces during Step 2. This process will need to be considered in more detail during Step 3, with Step 4 in mind and potentially a general relaxation of COVID-19 related restrictions.



In anticipation of greater numbers of staff starting to return to the workplace you should be considering (if not already):

- Understanding what your organisational plan is for the numbers of staff and areas of the building being remobilised;
- Reviewing your COVID-19 risk assessment and any subsequent COVID-19 Secure control measures to reflect any changes;
- Reviewing and updating any return to work information and advice for staff to reflect any changes that have been made;
- Checking the requirements for your emergency evacuations and first aiders relevant to the building and in particular "new" areas, floors or departments re-opening;
- Check, update and/or provide policy and procedures for home and hybrid (those combining elements of home and office-based work) workers. This should cover contact and communication as well as physical and mental health and technology;
- The information you have on your building environment and specifically air and water quality, staff returning the workplace will be looking for reassurance;
- Employees may have worries returning to work and there needs to be a support system to manage stress. Does yours need updating?;
- Develop an organisational policy and procedure to address the matter of any employees returning to work who, have not wished, or not been able, to have a vaccination or may still be vulnerable.
- Reviewing your organisation's travel policy and procedures to reflect current Government guidelines.



## Step 4 – at least five weeks after the introduction of Step 3 and no earlier than the 21st June 2021.

Prior to the commencement of Step 4, “the government will complete a review of social distancing and other long-term measures that have been put in place to cut transmission. This will inform decisions on the timing and circumstances under which the rules on 1 metre plus, the wearing of face coverings and other measures may be lifted.”

Subject to confirmation, Step 4 should see:

- No legal limits on social contact and life events (such as weddings); and
- Restrictions eased on larger events and performances.

With the situation allowing we should be seeing more of a return to normal, although the Government points out, “this will be subject to the results of a scientific Events Research Programme to test the outcome of certain pilot events through the spring and summer, where we will trial the use of testing and other techniques to cut the risk of infection. The same Events Research Programme will guide decisions on whether all limits can be removed on weddings and other life events”.

For employers, the extent to which their workforce will return to work after this time, and to what extent, looks like it is going to vary. Again anecdotally, while some are looking to resume “business as usual” from the summer, others are planning a more phased return with September an alternative target.

How this will affect staffing numbers is not clear as policies regarding hybrid/remote/agile (those combining elements of home, office or work at other locations) work are agreed and rolled out. However, the building environment, as well as general health and safety, are likely to remain in the spotlight, especially with a greater awareness of public health.

Reviewing your current management of health and safety across your premises and having in place independent, verifiable information on your building environment will pay dividends over the coming months and beyond.

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Call us on  
+44 (0)1403 269375



Email us at  
[info@assurityconsulting.co.uk](mailto:info@assurityconsulting.co.uk)



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