



White Paper

COVID-19 secure control measures and the affect on people with disabilities

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Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, organisations have had to put in place suitable COVID-19 secure control measures to make sure that their buildings and services are safe for staff and visitors to use.

However, have you considered how some of these control measures may act as barriers to people with certain disabilities. If so, do you have additional arrangements in place to help overcome these barriers, whilst making sure that your site remains COVID-19 secure?

Whilst carrying out various health and safety compliance assessments, we have been pleased to see the Government recommended control measures put in place; face coverings, protective screens, hand sanitising stations and social distancing measures to name but a few.

As good as these control measures are for making sure that people entering buildings are protected from the hazard of COVID-19, we need to consider how some of these control measures, if put in the wrong place or poorly managed, could be a potential barrier to people with disabilities.

In order to make sure that your building continues to be COVID-19 secure, but also remains as inclusive as possible, here are a few considerations.



Signage

The signage in your buildings detail important information such as your site rules with regards to COVID-19. This needs to be suitably located in an obvious place, so that everyone is able to read and interpret them and not compromise otherwise clear wayfinding signage.

Make sure that signs and posters are positioned within your building are at a suitable height, if they are placed too high then they might be difficult to read. Additional considerations should be given to buildings that are open to the general public, or where you know that there are people who use wheelchairs, are of reduced stature or with children present, so that all potential users can easily read the information.

Ideally, signs should not be placed on doors, but on the leading edge of the wall so that they can be seen when the door is opened. There are exceptions to this, such as washroom door signs, pull/push signs and hazard warnings. Make sure that the font is suitable and well contrasted, so that it is easy for all to read the text as this will greatly aid people with vision impairments. The colour and type of design of a sign should be consistent throughout a building.

Where possible, use pictograms to supplement the text. This will aid people with cognitive impairments and learning difficulties, as well as people whose first language may not be English. Avoid using block capitals and try to use universal signs and symbols, whilst keeping signs simple. Don't make them complicated or distracting with lots of background images or patterns, as this will distract from the information you are trying to provide and may make it harder for people with visual or cognitive impairments to understand.

Many buildings have social distancing markers and one ways system signs. When used on the floor, make sure that they are easy to see. Consider making them well contrasted, non-slip to prevent accidents and non-reflective to glare. Signs with plastic or laminated surfaces should be positioned to avoid reflections or light distortions, which can make them difficult to read and understand.

If there is a large footfall in the area, then signs may need to be placed on walls as well as the floors, so that people can see them easily. Cleaning of 2-metre markers or replacement of them may be needed as we approach the year anniversary of the start of this pandemic.



Face coverings

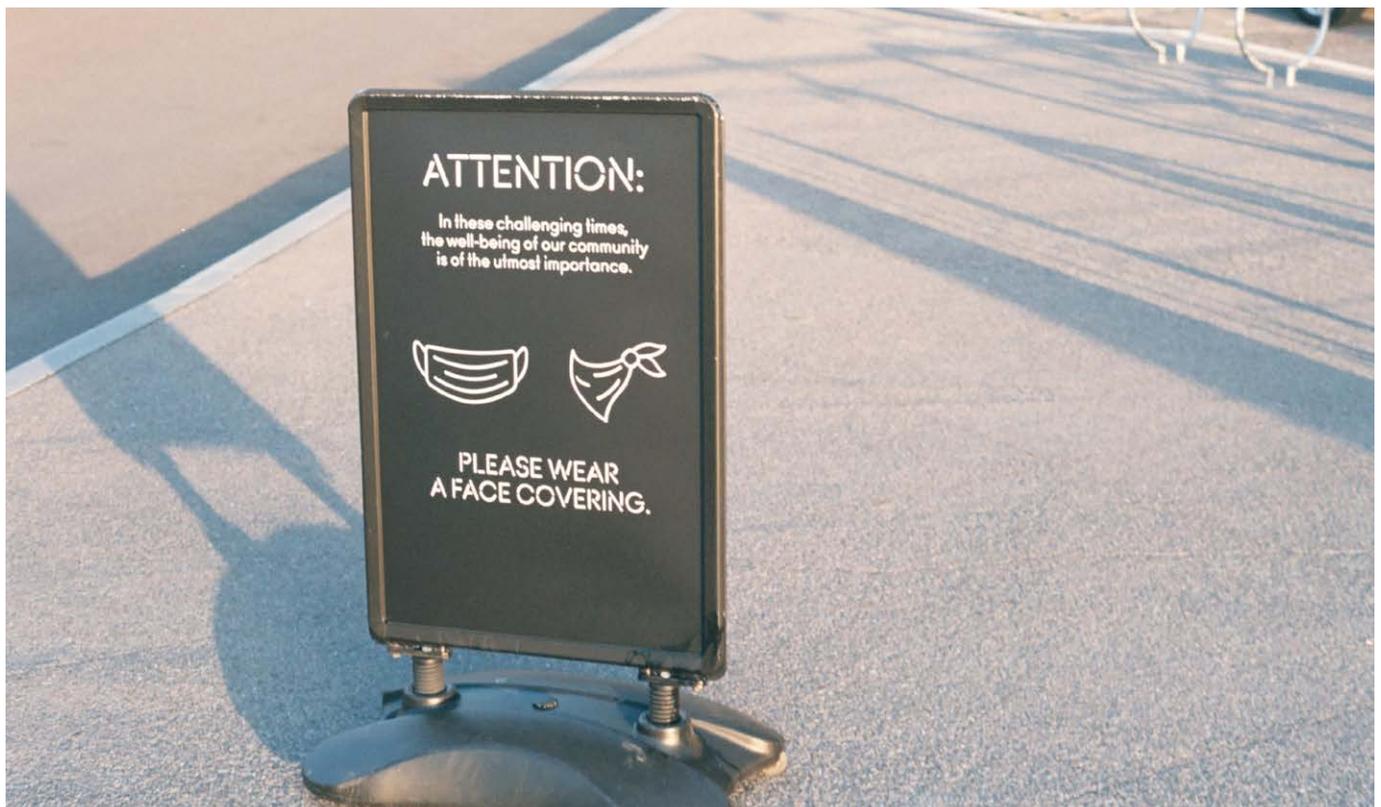
Face coverings are likely to be one of your building's main COVID-19 secure control measures. Often we see signs by an entrance to a building stating whether people are expected to wear face coverings when in the building, this can be very useful. However, not everyone is able to wear a face covering and this could be due to a disability.

Make sure any security staff managing entrance doors or your reception staff are aware of the 'hidden disability' campaign. The campaign helps raise awareness of hidden disabilities which could make wearing a face covering difficult. Train staff to look out for the hidden disability sunflower lanyard.

For customer facing staff, the type of face coverings used should be considered and made flexible. It is good to offer people a choice of what face covering they use. In places such as reception areas, a plastic visor face covering maybe more suitable for reception staff, especially to aid people with hearing or visual impairments in communicate with staff. Many people rely on lip reading to communicate, and this would not be possible if the lower part of the face is covered as it would distort what customer facing staff are trying to say.

Many people without disabilities struggle to communicate with people who wear face coverings. People with hearing impairments are likely to struggle even more. Many reception areas may have induction loops present, which can be used to aid people who use hearing aids in communicating with customer facing staff. However, you should be aware that again using a face covering may distort the clarity of speech, potentially making it more difficult for people who use hearing aids.

Customer facing staff should use face coverings that cover their mouths to protect them, but having arrangements in place, so that alternative provisions and aids are available, will help with communication should a person with a disability struggle to communicate effectively with staff.



Screens

Make sure that when placing protective screens, you consider where there are lights positioned, so that you are not causing any additional glare. Light positioning is also important when people are trying to lip read, if the face is cast in shadow, it could be difficult to follow.

If full height screens are used, make sure that manifestations are in place, or that the screen can be easily identified, to aid those with visual impairments in identifying the screens and generally, prevent people from accidentally walking into them.

Hand sanitizing stations

There is now a range of different hand sanitizing stations on offer. Make sure that access to these facilities are available to everyone, regardless of their height or disability:

- Where you have foot operated hand sanitising dispensers, make sure that alternative arrangements are in place for people who may not have use of their legs or feet to be able to use that facility.
- Make sure that wall mounted hand sanitising stations are not positioned too high, so that people of reduced stature, people who use wheelchairs or children are able to use these facilities independently.



Reduced Staff Levels

Currently, most office buildings do now have reduced occupancy levels, with staff encouraged to work from home where possible, but do make sure that arrangements have been put in place to provide assistance within your building:

- Review the number of people you have on site and the days that they work, to ensure that you have suitable first aid and fire warden cover.
- Review your procedures on how people can receive first aid and review your fire evacuation procedures.
- Have you altered your fire evacuation plan so that staff do not congregate at the usual assembly point, as it would be difficult for people to enforce social distancing measures?
- Review your personal emergency evacuation plans (PEEP).
- Do you have a person working within your building who has a disability and, if so, are the arrangements in place still suitable?
- Is their appointed buddy still present to provide assistance or are they working from home?
- Does a new buddy need to be appointed? If you have evacuation chairs present and used as a means of evacuation, are there people who are currently work within your building that are trained in how to use the chair safely?
- If the emergency pull cord is activated within your accessible washroom, who is responsible for providing assistance, and are they still present in your building?



Cleaning regimes

Another control measure that has been widely implemented is increased cleaning and the identification of touch points. Make sure that not only handrails, door handles and taps are on your touch point additional cleaning lists, but also areas that might get forgotten about such as:

- Accessible washroom door controls;
- Grab rails;
- Alarm pull cords;
- Automatic door opener buttons;
- Alarm reset panels;
- Toilet flushers;
- Nappy changing area;
- Light pull cords;
- Frequently used cupboards;
- Kitchen appliances; and
- Fridge door.

Put labels on areas considered a touch point, so staff are aware and wash their hands after touching them. This also acts as a reminder for cleaning staff, to know that they should too, pay particular attention in cleaning these areas.



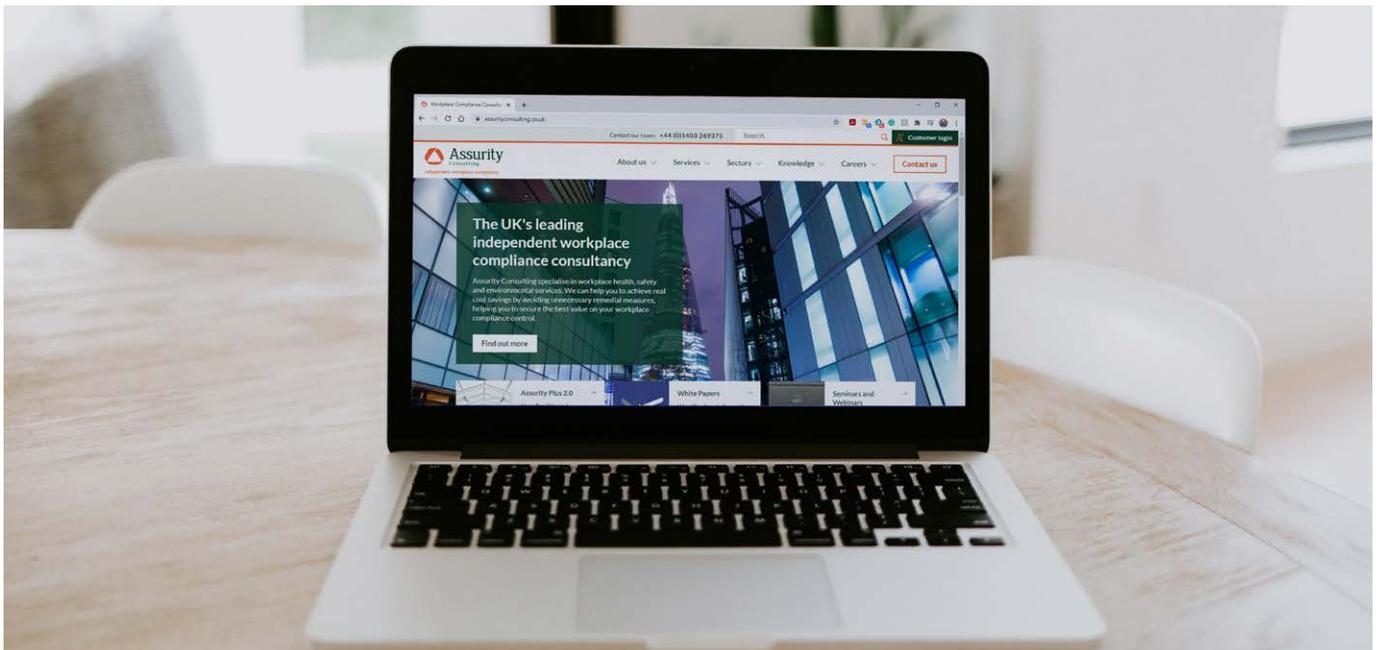
Website

People who may be visiting your building may find it useful having access information present on your website. This will allow people to know whether your building is open, what arrangements and facilities are in place, so that they know what to expect. They can then plan and prepare for their visit knowing the suitable COVID-19 secure control measure arrangements are in place.

If a one-way system is in place, it would be useful to mention where the entrance is located and whether face coverings are expected to be worn upon arrival. Details on how they can also gain assistance to your building or service if needed would be useful, especially if you have reduced numbers of staff within your buildings.

When putting this information on your website, make sure that the font, size and colour of your text is suitable for your audience type. Avoid excessive use of capital letters and try to include pictograms when appropriate. Beware of excess use of yellow, blue and green characters close to one another as this can cause issues for people with colour blindness.

This pandemic has impacted on the day-to-day life of everyone, but take a moment to consider the impact of our altered way of life for those with disabilities. Make sure the adjustments made for safety have not created a barrier for others and that our workplaces are still as inclusive as they possibly can be.



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Call us on
+44 (0)1403 269375



Email us at
info@assurityconsulting.co.uk



Visit our website
assurityconsulting.co.uk