



Archaeologists

COVID-19 Working Advice

V1.1 04/05/2020

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Introduction

All employers and employees must maintain social distancing and hygiene standards in line with Government advice. We expect most archaeological companies will be able to implement enhanced procedures and solutions due to the nature of the work.

This guidance offers advice for producing Safe Systems of Work (SSOW) and risk assessing archaeological work during the COVID-19 pandemic. Each workforce, company and site will have different requirements, and further restrictions may apply in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The Department of Health & Social Care (DHSC) and Public Health England (PHE) are leading the UK government response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

You can get up-to-date information about Coronavirus (COVID-19) and what you need to do on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

There is coronavirus information for people and businesses in other nations of the UK:

[Scotland from the Scottish Government](#)

[Wales is available from the Welsh Government](#)

[Northern Ireland has guidance on indirect](#)

The HSE is the relevant enforcing authority for PHE guidelines. If a site is not consistently implementing the measures set out by PHE, it may be subject to enforcement action.

PHE guidance for construction states “where it is not possible to follow the social distancing guidelines in full in relation to a particular activity, you should consider whether that activity needs to continue for the site to continue to operate, and, if so, take all the mitigating actions possible to reduce the risk of transmission”.

The health and safety requirements of any construction activity must not be compromised at this time. If an activity cannot be undertaken safely, it should not take place.

Emergency services are also under great pressure and may not be able to respond as quickly as usual. This should be taken into consideration in the planning of work activities, first aid, fire and emergency responses.

Organisations must have in place effective arrangements for monitoring and reviewing their compliance with Government guidance, and this document will be under constant review.

Planning archaeological works

Are you planning or undertaking archaeological work during COVID-19? There are key points where you need to stop and ask yourself, and colleagues, the following questions:

Planning travel or site work

- Does your risk assessment cover COVID-19 specific hazard controls?
- Does your risk assessment cover travel, site, welfare and accommodation?
- Do you have a Safe System of Work (SSOW) in place for site tasks during COVID-19?
- Have you considered the mental health of the people undertaking the work?
- Have you considered the effect to friends or family they live with?
- If not undertaking the work yourself, would you be happy to do what you are asking?
- Have you consulted with your staff or union reps?

Prior to travel or site work

- Have you been given a copy of your employers COVID-19 RAMS & SSOW with enough time prior to travel or commencement of work to read it, and been given the facility to ask questions or raise concerns?
- Are the Principal Contractors / contractors RAMS or SSOW available on site for all to read?
- Have you been made aware of reporting procedures for issues, and provided with written reassurance you will not be victimised or bullied for raising legitimate concerns?
- When being deployed to site has your mental health been considered?
- When being deployed to site has the effect on anyone you live with been considered?

Beginning travel or site work

- Have you received all site briefings, and are the relevant COVID-19 information displayed on site for reference?
- Can you see that the RAMS and SSOW are being adhered to?
- Are all the welfare, PPE & hygiene provisions in place?
- Are RA's and SSOW being continually reviewed and communicated on site?

If you can't answer positively to these questions, work should not commence. Raise the issue with your supervisor, manager, H&S manager or union rep.

Archaeological site work

- Keep 2m apart on site unless in an emergency. Well planned archaeological work in open settings can accommodate this.
- Hands must be washed (or use alcohol gel) before entering a vehicle, after arriving on site, before entering the welfare cabin(s) – whether at break time or not – and after using the toilet.
- Sufficient stocks of cleaning products should be maintained.
- Equipment such as tools, pens, pencils, clipboards and PPE to be allocated to each staff member and not shared. Labelling may be necessary. Do not pass tools and equipment to a colleague.
- Equipment such as phones, tablets, cameras, survey kit etc, should be cleaned after each use or allocated to only one member of the site team.
- Ideally only one person per site will be responsible for dealing with paper archives, such as taking out numbers from registers, and each staff member given their own supply of record sheets or folders should be cleaned after each use. Digital recording (GPS, tablet context capture) will negate the need for paper records and sharing of recording equipment.
- Storage and manual handling of items such as finds and samples will need to be carefully planned.
- Avoid taking equipment or site files into the home or office unless thoroughly cleaned or quarantined in line with latest advice.
- High risk activities should be considered carefully. For example, confined spaces work, excavation with risk of services strike, UXO or contamination. Emergency plans need to take into consideration the risk posed to the public, those who may need to be on site to monitor / fix any issues and the extra strain an incident could place on emergency services during COVID-19.
- Site briefings should adhere to social distancing and be conducted outside. The use of technology can control this risk e.g. sending briefing via email with read receipts.
- Site meetings and visitors should be limited, or happen via video call.
- Plans should be made for site down time (e.g. bad weather or waiting for attendance). If there is no need for archaeological attendance staff should not be expected to wait on site.
- Sites should be inspected by the H&S manager (and H&S union rep if in place) within the first week of site.
- If smaller teams are used make sure work pressures are not increased (e.g. expecting staff to do more or asking for lone working) and archaeological standards should not suffer.
- Staff should be briefed on how to deal with the public. The key government message is still stay at home and challenges may be made as to why we are working.
- Staff should be provided with a clear instruction on how to raise issues or concerns.

Site travel

- All travel and accommodation needs to be risk assessed, and 3rd party company COVID-19 procedures made available to staff.
- No away work should be completed unless individual accommodation can be provided.
- No travel should involve public transport unless absolutely necessary. Key workers need this. Individuals should only travel when 2m distances can be maintained. This may require off peak travel and staggered start/finish times. To be discussed with staff prior to deployment.
- Movement of staff between sites should be limited.
- Only 1 person per vehicle or use vehicles where 2m distances can be maintained such as a large SUV or 4x4 with 2 people. This may only be relaxed with those who live together. Open windows will not prevent virus spread if there is contact between people or belongings.
- Make sure there is adequate space to store and transport individual belongings separately.
- Staff should not be asked to travel or work where government social distancing rules cannot be maintained. This can create elevated health (both mental and physical) risks for those living but not working together. It also increases numbers who need to self-isolate should an individual become sick.
- All vehicles should be cleaned before and after use if not sole use. Attention should be paid to door handles, steering wheels, buttons, gear sticks and interior surfaces. Cleaning time is considered work time.
- Any extra expenses for cleaning of vehicles, or time for travel or cleaning should be factored into the working day and budgets.
- Rest breaks on long journeys need to be planned to make sure services are open, and staff can maintain social distancing.
- Gloves should be worn for refuelling.
- Emergency or breakdown procedures need to be reviewed to make sure they are adequate.

Welfare

- Make sure cabins are big enough to allow 2m between staff, or only allow 1 person at a time with cleaning between uses. If there are larger canteens mark out 2m spaces.
- Space out changing facilities and consider marking changing zones 2m apart. Do not share pegs, lockers, benches. Make sure everyone has their own space. If this cannot be done, only 1 person at a time may use the facility and it must be cleaned after each person.
- Mark out 2m spaces between urinals, wash basins and toilet cubicles. If this cannot be done, only 1 person at a time may enter the toilet facilities, and it must be cleaned after each person.
- Make sure there is sufficient space in walkways, carparks, entrances etc to allow 2m distances.
- Site offices must be organised to allow 2m distancing.
- Numbers of individuals entering smoking areas should be limited to maintain 2m distances.
- Provision needs to be made to allow hand washing (or use alcohol gel) before entering a vehicle, after arriving on site, before entering the welfare cabin(s) – whether at break time or not – and after using the toilet.
- Welfare should be thoroughly cleaned once a day, with localised cleaning after each use and/or before each break, including surfaces, toilets, door handles, light switches, generator buttons, kettles, microwave buttons/handles.
- All food should be brought from home to avoid the need to visit shops during the working day. There must be no sharing of food or drinks.
- All staff should have their own cups/cutlery/crockery and will take them home to wash at the end of each day.
- Sufficient stocks of cleaning products will be maintained. Any extra products you buy for cleaning at work can be expensed to the employer.
- Registers should be maintained to document cleaning regimes.
- Staggered start times may be required to facilitate the above.

Emergency Procedures

- All first aiders should be briefed on the updated instructions from St Johns Ambulance <https://www.sja.org.uk/get-advice/first-aid-advice/covid-19-advice-for-first-aiders/>
- First aid kits should be checked and updated. Masks & gloves should be available with the kit. It is also recommended the first aid kit contains a towel for CPR <https://www.resus.org.uk/media/statements/resuscitation-council-uk-statements-on-covid-19-coronavirus-cpr-and-resuscitation/covid-community/>
- A provision for mental health support, such as Mental Health First Aiders and/or Employee Assistance Programmes should be available for staff.
- Emergency details should be checked and updated, some A&E departments and walk in centres have closed.
- No one should attend site if they are unwell. Plans should be made and communicated to staff for how people will leave site should they become unwell.
- As there may be fewer staff available, and it may take longer to mobilise replacements, contingency plans should be made ahead of time if staff are not able to attend site.
- Advice and procedures should be reviewed for emergency vehicle break downs or accidents.
- Increased emergency service response times should be factored into any rescue plan.
High risk activities should be thoroughly assessed.
- Procedures and advice should be provided to staff should they face comment, criticism or conflict about being at work.
- Lone working procedures should be in place if staff are working remotely.
- Site evacuation procedures should still adhere to social distancing rules and should be communicated to all staff. Assembly points should be placed in an area large enough to accommodate this.
- Staff should make sure their company has up to date contact details for themselves and next of kin.
- If staff fall ill and believe they contracted COVID-19 on site, they must report this immediately.

Reporting issues

If at any time you do not feel safe or are confident all practical controls are being undertaken to protect staff wellbeing and safety then you must raise it.

The following is our suggested order of raising issues:

- Talk to your supervisor, line manager or project manager immediately, or the site manager. Suggest a solution to the issue you have raised. Follow this up with an email so the concern is in writing.

If a concern is not addressed:

- Talk to your company H&S manager
- Talk to your union rep or H&S staff committee member

If the concern is still not addressed:

- Raise the issue with the national Archaeologist branch officer Andy Bye, Diggers Forum, CIFA or BAJR.
- Contact the [CIFA whistleblowing hotline](#)
- Raise the issue with the HSE using the [contact form](#)
- To provide information on unsafe working and a lack of social distancing on construction sites you can contact UNITE call 0207 622 2442 or email construction@unitetheunion.org