

# Safely returning to work after the easing of Covid-19 lockdown

Prof Anne Harriss, President, Society of Occupational Medicine (June 2020-21)

# SOM has produced guidance designed to develop:

- Plans for effective approaches to return to work within what will come a “new normal”
- Risk assessment based approaches protecting/promoting the health, safety and wellbeing of employees
- Strategies intended to protect workforce health and maintain productivity
- Opportunities to create “good jobs”
- Supportive managers

# How the Corona-19 virus spreads – fundamental to the risk assessment

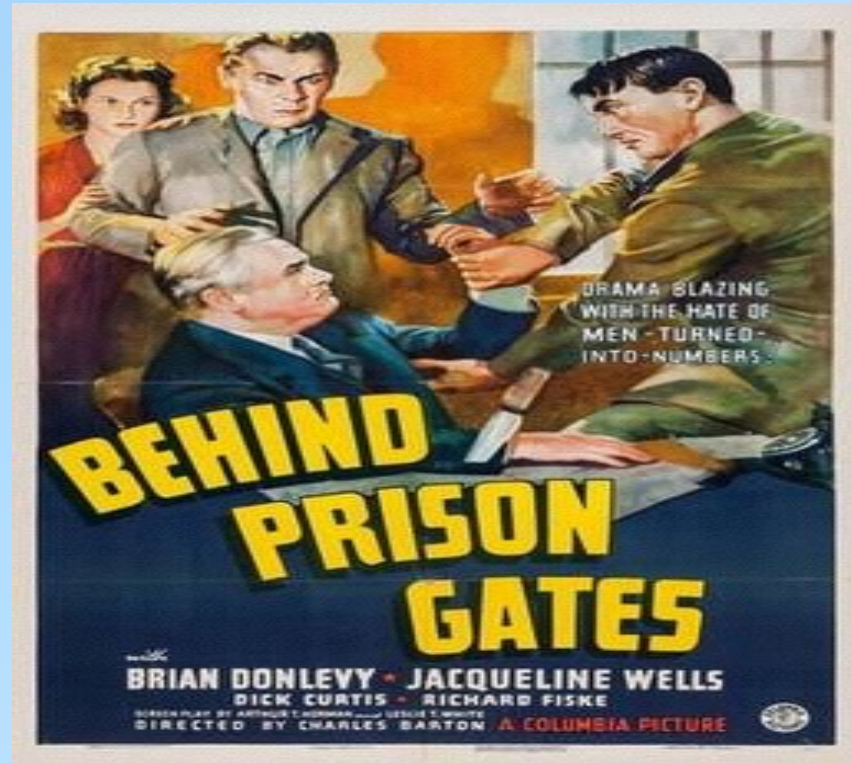
## Two modes of spread

- **Droplets:** Predominantly by coughing, sneezing - respiratory hygiene etiquette and safe disposal of tissues essential
- **Surfaces:** A person sneezes: droplets land on surfaces (eg table, desks, computer keyboards). A person touches the surface it then spreads onto their hands they put themselves at risk when they touch their face or eyes. They put others at risk if they then touch other surfaces. NB Regular hand washing/alcohol rubs!!.
- This web link shows surface to surface spread: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZmOzlXASjV8>

# Key people involved in or consulted in the decision making process

- Human resource professionals
- Facilities managers
- Occupational health; health and safety and allied professionals
- Include trade union/employee representatives within your discussions. Have them on your side not against you
- Board of Directors, Senior and line managers

For some workers lockdown may have felt like being



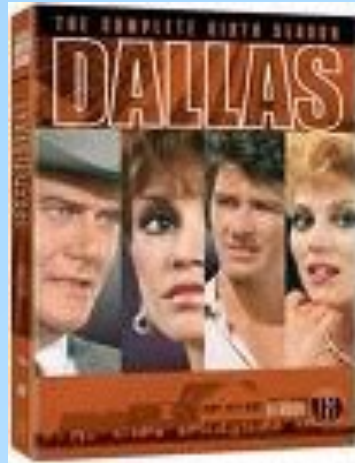
# For others - an enjoyable experience



# A new way of working, for some back in the workplace, for others still home-work

- Health, safety and wellbeing should be paramount- but -
  - Social distancing guidance may need to be adjusted - 2meters down to 1meter (Manual handling tasks - with PPE)
  - Restricted access to canteens and social spaces
  - Social interaction at work is part of the workplace culture, this will change from the point lock down is eased and people return to work
- Home-working may become the new norm - does not suit everyone could be distractions such as young children, others also home-working
- Phase the return to work - new working teams may be established.
- Protect vulnerable workers - they should continue to work from home, particularly in the short term.

A number of considerations –  
remember Dallas







# Who shot JR?

- Premises



- Process



- People



- Equipment



# HSE Five Steps to Risk Assessment

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Download free pamphlets at:

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg163.pdf>

## Return to work – general issues

- Use a risk assessment approach to underpin strategies to ensure the workplace, and work processes do not put employees at risk.
- Consider the possible impact on mental **and** physical health.
- Plan the return.
- The SOM toolkit, assists businesses to manage, and sustain, this return <https://www.som.org.uk>

# Think .....

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**Premises, People, Process, Equipment, Policies, Procedures**  
Hazards- Biological, Chemical, Ergonomic, Psycho-social

Consider the work cycle:

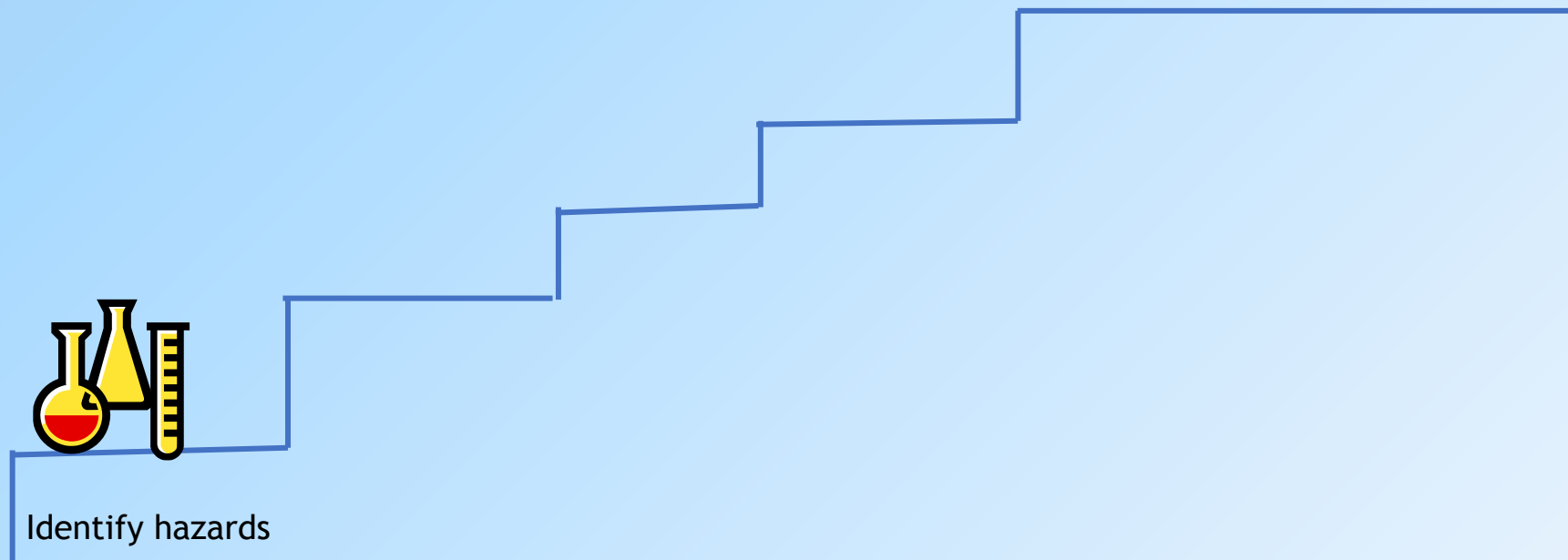
What is done and how it is undertaken

Safe Systems of work

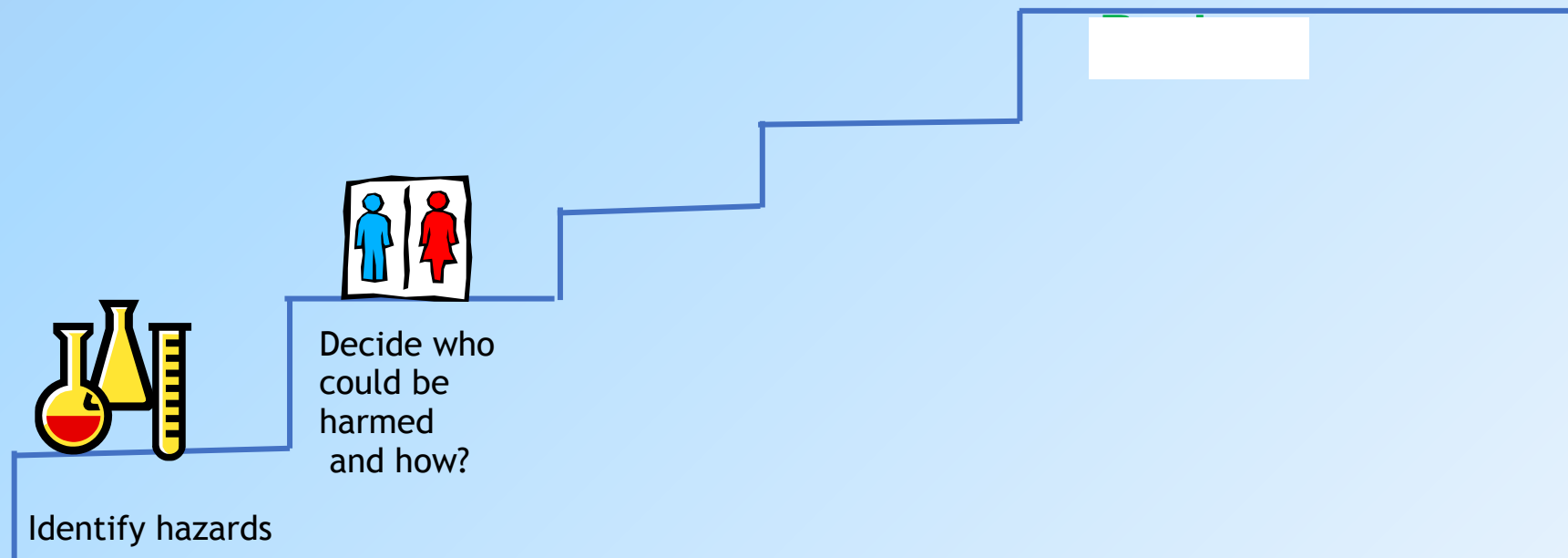
Some questions: Who? What? Where? When? Why - Can we change the way we work post Covid-19?

Implications?

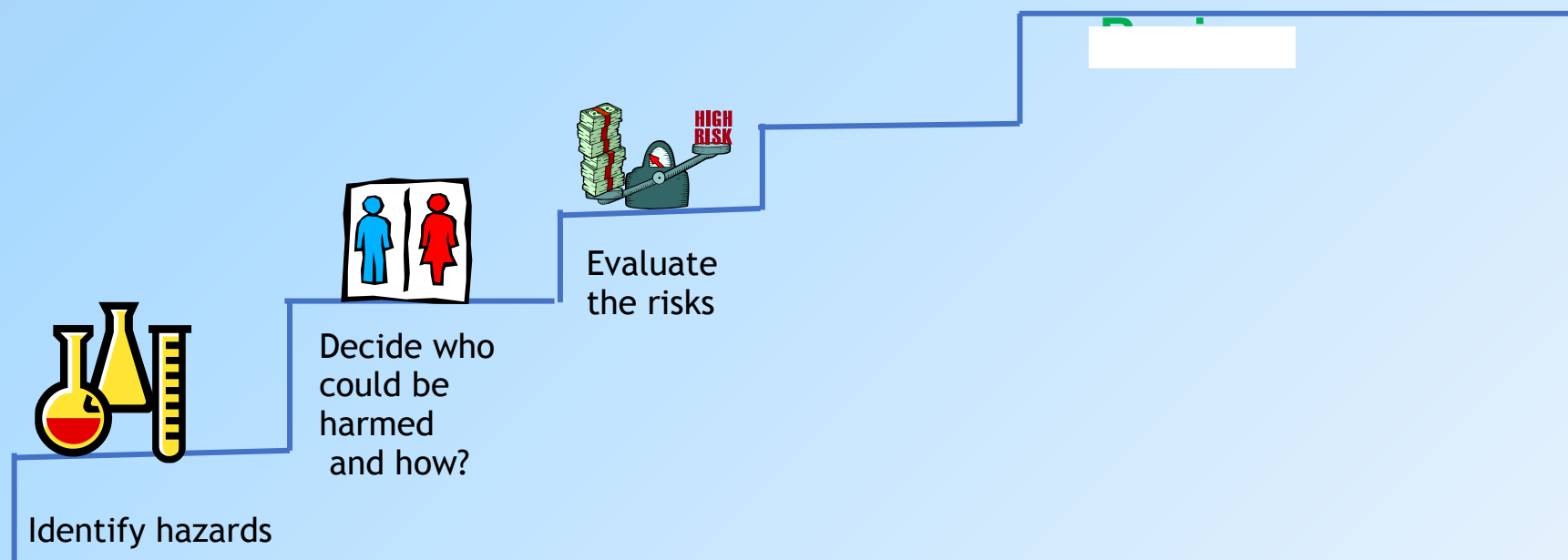
## Five Steps to Risk Assessment - step 1



## Five Steps to Risk Assessment - step 2

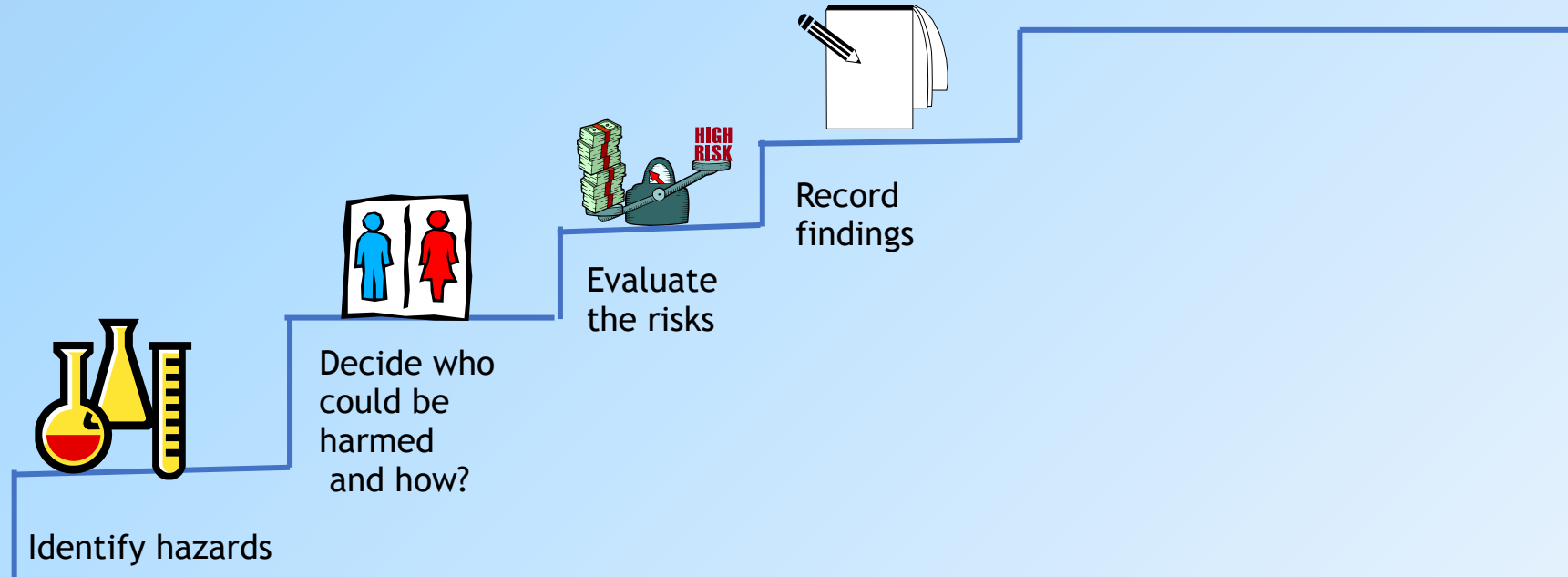


## Five Steps to Risk Assessment - step 3

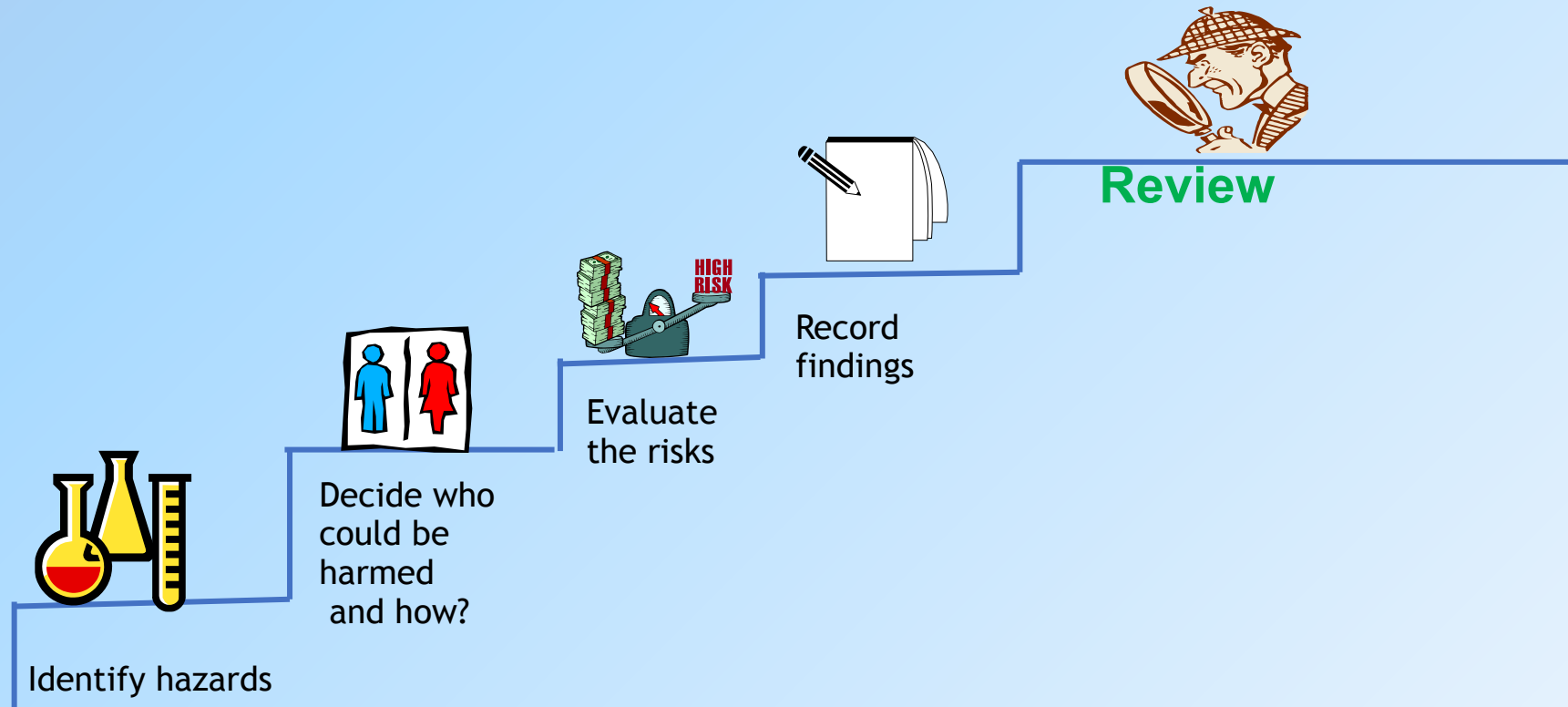




## Five Steps to Risk Assessment - step 4



## Five Steps to Risk Assessment - step 5



# Health considerations – Mental health

- **Mental health** for a very large proportion of workers - shaking up a large bottle of lemonade then opening it in a confined space - the effects are likely to be dramatic
- Exacerbation of pre-existing mental ill-health - depression, anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorders, agoraphobia.
- health care staff - likely to be serious knock on effect for those who have been delivering care on Covid-19 wards (PTSD)

# Covid-19 Health considerations: Physical health

- Some workers will have had a relatively mild infection, others may have had a much more serious infection particularly those having received intensive care. Long term effects on their lungs and other organs/tissues +/- additional effects on mental health (PTSD)
- Some health conditions may not have received optimal surgical or other care due to the risks of hospital admission - for example surgery for cancer
- Regular outpatient clinics have been cancelled as a result of Covid-19 - the health of some workers may have therefore deteriorated

# Important issues

- Social distancing
- Hygiene
- Work management
- Mental and physical health support
- Make provision for people who may be taken ill at work - first aid service

# Protecting health and maintaining productivity UK guidance – can be applied globally

- Government guidance for employers and business at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19>
- Guidance for specific sectors at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-guidance>
- HSE guidance at: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/news/coronavirus.htm#>

# What the SOM toolkit seeks to address

## Supporting employers to:

- Identify what the new way of working will look like
- Use a risk assessment approach to help plan a safe, effective return to work
- Create the right framework - good managers, good jobs, productive workforce

## Guidance and challenges:

- Guidance for employers - to consider facets of the premises, people, process and equipment to ensure they do the workforce no harm
- Challenges in the workplace -
  - implementing 1meter social distancing, use of lifts, corridors, maintaining hygiene
  - cohorting

# reducing the impact of infection

- Government guidance on social distancing and vulnerable people at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults>
- Government guidance on protecting the most vulnerable and shielding at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>



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# Resources: SOM and ALAMA

RTW general toolkit

<https://www.som.org.uk/return-to-work/>

Mental wellbeing:

[https://www.som.org.uk/Sustaining\\_work\\_relevant\\_mental\\_health\\_post\\_COVID-19\\_toolkit.pdf](https://www.som.org.uk/Sustaining_work_relevant_mental_health_post_COVID-19_toolkit.pdf)

Advice for SMEs:

[https://www.som.org.uk/Sustaining\\_work\\_relevant\\_mental\\_health\\_post\\_COVID-19\\_toolkit.pdf](https://www.som.org.uk/Sustaining_work_relevant_mental_health_post_COVID-19_toolkit.pdf)

Covid-age resource:

<https://alama.org.uk/covid-19-medical-risk-assessment/>