

**Using behavioural science techniques  
for safer site operation during  
COVID-19 restrictions.  
27/04/2020 rev3**



This document is a guidance note for those in charge of businesses and construction sites that may be operational or re-opening during the COVID-19 health restrictions.

This document does not specify the advice and requirements from your government or local authority and should be read in conjunction with the most recent guidance.

With our knowledge of behavioural science, we have produced a number prompts, questions and things to remember, that should help you make the behaviours you want, more likely to happen.

**This document is split into 3 sections.**

- 1 – Strategic, notes to help you decide and start.
- 2 – Tactical, notes to help you plan and organise.
- 3 – Operational, notes to help you manage and operate.

If you would like any assistance in designing or implementing any of the contents within this document, or for us to review your current plans for effectiveness, then please get in touch as we'd be more than happy to chat with you.

Kind regards

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## **Strategic** - Deciding

What are your company's values around the COVID-19 Pandemic?

What are your standards around working and operating?

What is ok? What is not ok? When does it become not ok?

What are your honest reasons for continuing to operate or reopening closed sites?

- A critical project as defined by government?
- Cashflow? Survival? – What is the minimum you need?
- Money to workers? – who needs money most?
- Helping Clients? – Who needs help most?
- Helping your supply chain? – Who needs help most?

Which sites are easiest to maintain social distancing and COVID-19 reduced-risk behaviours?  
Those with lots of space? Sites with less people? Outside?

Each site/ office should have a specific plan to minimise exposure to each other and transmission of virus. It must be made specific to the local area for it to mean something.

Senior leaders should set the expectation to each site/project manager and contracts manager. The seriousness and risk of opening should be discussed and made clear. The senior manager should make it clear that he is expecting the person in charge of the site to not open unless they are confident they can operate and maintain a safe site. This is important.

## **Tactical** - Planning

Who should work? Who gets back to work? Consider only using those who are least vulnerable and those who are not living with vulnerable people.

Each site, each part of the site, each office, each group of workers will have a different set of circumstances, pattern of interactions, and physical environment.

Therefore, the solutions or control measures will have to be local too.

It is not just the site or office; the canteen, vending machines, restrooms/toilets, travel arrangements. All these areas need a strategy and defined 'new' ways of operating too. Again, local controls and arrangements are key.

Create an operating plan for each site. Hold a planning session, walk around site, highlight areas that need attention. Involve supervisors, safety, key personnel who are based on site. This will give them some ownership of the plan to operate safely.

Think about stair access, one way systems, in and out, up and down. BIM could be used to map out routes, evaluate potential cluster spots and help calculate the maximum number of people in an area including which trades when.

People will need clear, unambiguous guidance, preferably with examples where possible, to help visualise the required behaviour.

Be pinpointed with what you are asking for. Do not assume you have been understood.

Trust but verify by asking people to describe the behaviour, ask them to demonstrate it, and observe execution.

People don't do a new behaviour just because they are told or asked to, even if they intend to.

New behaviours have to be learned. They require prompting and then reinforcing a number of times before they become the norm.

You should expect a level of non-compliance. This will not be out of badness or defiance in most cases. If it is, evaluate the relationship between supervisor and worker!

Some people might have genuine difficulty exhibiting the desired behaviour. - If the person is up for doing the behaviour but needs help being re-conditioned, everything should be about support through prompts, reminders, and reinforcement. But, at some point both parties might have to agree that the person just can't operate this way and needs to go home.

## **Operational** - Operating

Where possible, use physical markings in the environment to help people visualise the distancing rule. and a person with local influence telling everyone what they expect.

Nothing will be better than observing people and how they work, then providing feedback and revising plans on what you see.

Spotters would be beneficial, i.e. task someone specifically to observe and call out the undesired behaviour and praise the desired behaviour. Helping to recondition people into the new required way of working. This could be one of the gang taking turns to be the spotter.

It might be beneficial to create a specific role for the additional wiping down/sanitising of surfaces, door handles, canteen, toilets, machine cabs, vehicles, small tools. Check in regularly with your workforce, some might be feeling anxious about working.

Make the invisible, visible. Consider stickers on surfaces that get touched often to remind people that they might be contaminated. Use bright colours to catch attention, Red is associated with danger, Yellow/green associated with sickness.

Use imagery of germs/viruses where possible. Sodak can supply stickers of various sizes and designs. [Click here for an order form.](#)



The local influencers, supervisors etc will be critical to getting those who work for them to do the new behaviours.

Provide feedback, lots of it. Feedback about the behaviours, feedback about COVID-19. Thank your people often for their help. Use the Sodak, at-risk reduced-risk measure, ([click here to download](#)) specifically for COVID-19 behaviours. Share and publish the data, discuss at a local level.

Consider the use of proximity alert hardware. Use tracking data to reinforce more of the behaviours you want. [Example here](#).

Contain and limit your workers range of movement (nicely). What is happening at break times? Are people heading to the shops (those that are open)? Advise limiting the contact people do with others, ie. Please bring packed lunch, don't go to the shops. Some might have to eat in the van rather than the canteen. Staggered lunch breaks maybe required.

Keep gangs together where possible. Tell the gangs that you need their help and that each of them needs each other's help to embed these new behaviours. This is about collective responsibility. Each worker should call out each other's behaviours, that are not inline with the new rules.

Make it personal – discuss with each of your workers, “who are you protecting as well as yourself, co-workers, family, friends?” If each worker knows if one of their peers is living with a vulnerable family member, they will hopefully be more cautious.

Discuss how they should keep their family safe as they might be bringing the virus back into the house, what can they do to limit this? What can you do to limit this? Site could be classed as dirty, but cars and vans are classed as clean. Controls for decontaminating before you get into van or car. So, it happens before home.

Explain honestly, why they are being asked to work, prestige of being a key worker, this is how you are helping us, you and society. But they can't take shortcuts, this return to work comes with requirements. You are not expected to act like a superhero and take risks.

Create a new social norm by often reinforcing the desired behaviours. Show workers photos of other workers doing the correct behaviours. Post these pictures around the worksite. Make it obvious what the desired behaviours look like. Use real, local people/workers in the photos where possible.

Make it easy – make anything that you are asking as easy as possible, access to cleaning products, access to PPE, routes around site, social distancing in canteen (cover every other chair). Social distancing in toilets (cover every other urinal).

Behavioural drift – look out for behaviours drifting back to the norm. People will become complacent. Combat this by frequent reminders about what is required, feedback on how they are doing and where possible.

## RESOURCES

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Link to a previous webinars and blog post around COVID-19 behaviours.

**COVID-19 sticker order form -**

<https://sodak.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/sticker-selection.pdf>

**May 2020 Discussion between Bob and Dr John about this document. -**

<https://vimeo.com/419009654/6053324f69>

**April 2020 - Reaching Results COVID-19 resource page –**

<https://reachingresults.com/covid-19-behavioral-science/>

**March 2020 - Dr John Austin and Dr Nicole Gravina -**

<https://youtu.be/s1EGBD6Lc5c>

**From a friend of Dr John's who did some famous studies on reducing face touching...**

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/get-out-your-mind/202003/how-stop-touching-your-face>