

Risk assessment Guidance



Risk Assessment – how to use this resource

This resource will help you develop your own COVID-19 risk assessment and identify the potential risks you will need to mitigate to comply with Health and Safety Executive standards. The template is a starting point and can be used alongside guidance from the Health and Safety Executive and where relevant, any additional requirements stated by your landlord if you rent a therapy room in a commercial premises.

This resource is designed for private practitioners either practising from their homes or from a rented premises. If you work in an organisational setting you should follow their COVID-19 policies and procedures.

This resource does not constitute legal or other professional advice but is intended to support practitioners by providing general information and advice, up to date at the time of publication. This resource is only an example and, as such, is not exhaustive and should be reviewed and amended to reflect your practice. It is ultimately the responsibility of you as a practitioner to manage your own risk mitigation processes and procedures.

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Risk Assessment – why do we need one?

Employers and many self-employed persons are legally required to protect employees and others from harm under section 2 and 3 of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, and part of this requirement entails the assessment of hazards and risks and more specifically, the elimination or mitigation of those risks under The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (MHSWR). The MHSWR requires employers and the self-employed to undertake a suitable and sufficient assessment of the risks to the health and safety of themselves, clients and others who may be affected. Those who are self-employed will usually be exempt from health and safety obligations if their work activity poses no potential risk to the health and safety of others, but this is unlikely to apply to therapists

The purpose of a risk assessment is to try to anticipate potentially harmful occurrences or situations in the workplace and to take reasonably practicable measures to prevent them from happening.

Undertaking a risk assessment involves looking at all the tasks and functions within the workplace and identifying all the significant **hazards** that might occur – people, things or processes that could cause injury or illness in your business. Once the hazards have been identified, an assessment should be made of the seriousness of the harm and the likelihood of that harm occurring (the risk). Lastly, appropriate control measures should be put in place to try to prevent the harm occurring or if this isn't possible, to mitigate or control the risk.



A risk assessment must look at:

1. identifying the hazards to which people will be exposed
2. who will be exposed to the risks and how that exposure may occur
3. evaluating the risks – check what measures are in place already to control the risks and, if necessary, introduce additional control measures to reduce risks as low as is reasonably practicable and meet legal requirements
4. recording your findings and making the risk assessment (including details of all risks identified and the measures employed to control the risks) available to all those who need to be aware of it. It would be prudent to ensure that all relevant persons record that they have read and understood the risk assessment.

NB risk assessments must be regularly reviewed and audited (usually on an annual basis) and especially when situations or personnel in the workplace change (e.g. risks associated with the COVID-19 pandemic).

The risk assessment must be carried out by a competent person and, for workplaces with five or more employees, it is a requirement for it to be documented. It must cover all aspects of a business or operation, identify the significant hazards, and take account of changing personnel, conditions and hazards in the workplace and work activity. The size and complexity of the risk assessment will vary widely depending on the workplace.

The process of risk assessment should involve consultation with staff (if any) and other relevant persons, particularly if you are sharing a workspace e.g. health centre, as this provides an insight into the risks and hazards of the work. Consultation must also feature once the findings of the risk assessment are completed.

The principles of risk assessment are:

- identify the hazards
- decide who might be harmed and how
- evaluate the risks and decide on precautions
- record your findings and implement them
- review your assessment and update if necessary.

Hierarchy of control (ERICPD)

The order in which the necessary control measures should be considered is:

- **Elimination** – stopping the hazardous activity or technique, equipment or substance.
- **Reduction** – reduce the risk by substituting for a less hazardous one.
- **Isolate** – segregate people from the hazard – i.e. guarding.
- **Control** – i.e. reduce the time of exposure to the hazard.
- **PPE** – Personal Protective Equipment is a last resort and is usually worn with other control measures.
- **Discipline** – safe systems of work.

How does this apply to those in private practice?



The aim of providing this guidance is to enable therapists and counsellors to keep themselves and their clients safe and reduce the risk of injury or transmitting viruses (like COVID-19) during sessions at the therapist's home or in a rented premises. It is hoped that the principles of this guidance may be helpful in planning and carrying out face-to-face activities in a home environment particularly during COVID-19.

Therapists cannot be expected to eliminate everyday risks, but they must make sure that they know about the main risks and the things they need to do to manage them responsibly. Generally, they will need to do everything 'reasonably practicable' to protect themselves, their clients and other relevant persons from harm. This means balancing the level of risk against the measures needed to control the real risk, in terms of money, time or trouble.

The risk assessment should therefore only include what therapists could reasonably be expected to know – they are not expected to anticipate unforeseeable risks.

If it is deemed necessary to hold a face-to-face session, therapists will need to use their best endeavours to ensure that they are complying with statutory safety requirements and check the latest government guidance on social distancing, PPE, hygiene and how to deal with clients who may have vulnerabilities.

This may include ensuring that there is a facility for both therapists and clients to wash their hands or using hand sanitiser at the beginning and at the end of the session, checking the health status of the client at the start of the session and sanitising all relevant areas after the session.

Therapists must consider whether there are additional risks when working in the home environment as opposed to renting a space in a clinic or building, where there may be corresponding risk assessments in place on behalf of the owner/person in control of the building.

Legislation

- [Health and Safety at Work Act 1974](#)
- Health and Safety Authority (Ireland): www.hsa.ie/eng
- Health and Safety Executive: www.hse.gov.uk
- [Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999](#)

Resources



- [HSE Risk assessment during COVID-19](#)
- [HSE guidance for ventilation](#)
- [HSE guidance for cleaning and hygiene in the workplace](#)
- [HSE guidance for social distancing in the workplace](#)
- [HSE \(HSG268\) The Health and Safety Toolbox – how to control risks at work](#)
- [HSE \(HSG65\) Managing for Health and Safety](#)