

Swap the Dining Room Table for a COVID-19 Secure Office Space

Submitted by: Relations Group

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With a second wave of COVID-19 sweeping the country, the nation has been placed into a second national lockdown, meaning many must work from home once again. But unlike in March, this period of isolation has an end date, and come 2nd December, a return to the office will likely be an option for several areas of the UK. So how can we swap the dining room table for an office desk as safely as possible? The answer: flexible office spaces.

COVID-19 has turned the world of work upside down!

In less than a year, we have seen all non-essential services adapt to their entire workforce working remotely, an exponential rise in the use of virtual meeting platforms, and most recently, a socially distanced return to the office.

But as was predicted prior to the easing of restrictions, case numbers are spiking across the country for the second time, and in a bid to slow the spread and reduce contraction rates, the government has announced a second national lockdown, with all non-essential workers encouraged to work from home until 2nd December.

After this point, however, a return to the office is likely to be an option for many with the current strategy suggesting that the lockdown will make way for a tiered system once again, with those living in low-risk areas allowed greater freedoms.

“Employees now hold the balance of power when it comes to flexible working”

This will no doubt be a welcome change after another month of working from home. But the office landscape has changed significantly since prior to the pandemic, and according to Richard Smith Founder and CEO of pioneering flexible office brokerage Office Freedom, employees now hold the balance of power when it comes to flexible working.

“COVID-19 has caused a real sea change in how people view office spaces, and how they want to use their time in the office,” Richard Smith explained.

“The time spent working from home has led to a renewed appreciation for the collaborative nature of office environments. People miss the social interaction and opportunities to share and develop ideas. Many employees are looking for a balance between home and office working but personal safety is the number one concern. The flexible workspace industry recognized this and has set the bar for safer offices.

“With the government advice being what it is and COVID-19 secure measures an absolute must, companies are able to demand more from office space than ever before. At the same time businesses are turning away from traditional leasing towards more agile workspace which offers a viable, safe and flexible alternative to home working.”

Working in COVID-19 secure offices – what should you expect?

Indeed, as we continue to get a feel for what 'the new normal' looks like, working in COVID-19 secure offices will likely become a reality for many across the country, even once this second lockdown has been and gone. But what exactly does that mean? How safe are offices and what is being done to protect workers and battle the virus in the workplace?

To allay fears and to make sure people are as safety savvy as possible, we've put together a list of what employees should expect from a COVID-19 secure workplace when looking to return to the office.

1. Distancing and new, safer layouts and fittings

It'll come as no surprise that workspaces, desks and seating have been spread out so as to ensure appropriate social distancing between staff. Similarly, office layouts have been altered to make for a more free-flowing workspace, whilst plexiglass dividers have been installed between adjacent desks to reduce

the risk of transmission, all of which are measures employees can expect within flexible office spaces.

2. Temperature Checks and 'Track and Trace'

A high temperature has long been recognised as a possible symptom of COVID-19, and as such, flexible office space providers are carrying out temperature checks upon entry, with workers registering a temperature of 38°C and above refused entry and referred to NHS protocols. These checks are non-invasive too, reducing the need for unnecessary close contact between staff and visitors. This service is also being used in tandem with 'Track and Trace' so as to prevent any further potential spread within the office community.

3. Sanitisation Stations and Enhanced Cleaning Protocols

Frequent and thorough hand washing is doctors' best advice for battling all sorts of infections, not just COVID-19, and to make this as easy as possible for residents, flexible workspaces have installed sanitisation stations throughout their offices. What's more, many flexible office providers have employed more cleaning staff, who are charged with carrying out an enhanced deep clean of the office each and every day, with high touch and common areas receiving special attention throughout the day.

4. Safe ventilation

Some of the earliest research into the transmission of COVID-19 found that air conditioning and ventilation systems played a significant part in reducing the spread of the virus, and this has been supported by a study by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control.¹ As a result, flexible office spaces have set about modifying their air conditioning systems according to the most up-to-date research. By reducing the recycling of old air and refreshing the office with air from the outside, flexible office providers are battling COVID-19 on another front.

Agile Flexible Office Spaces Are Leading The Way

The measures listed above are just some of the ways that employers should ensure a safe environment for their team. But it remains a mammoth undertaking. The administration of office spaces is a headache at the best of times, but COVID-19 has increased the magnitude of that task immeasurably – so much so that many companies and organisations have created and tasked entire departments with making their workspaces COVID-19 secure and protecting against the spread of the virus.

But with complete oversight and control of the office building's administration, flexible office spaces have been able to adapt the quickest to the latest - and ever-changing - COVID-19 safety advice. These flexible, ready-to-move-in spaces are managed by an operator with services and amenities on tap, flexible office spaces include serviced offices, private offices, as well as hotdesking facilities, and they are the safest option for those looking to return to a more traditional work set-up once the lockdown has been lifted.

What's more, the toll that the first nationwide lockdown had on workers' mental health has been well documented, and flexible office space providers are keen to combat the expected fallout from a second in such a short space of time. As well as being up to date on the latest safety guidelines at the workstations themselves, many flexible workspace operators provide COVID-19 secure wellness and health programmes to help keep workers' minds healthy as well as their bodies.

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NOTES FOR EDITORS

1 <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/Ventilation-in-the-context-of-COVID-19.pdf>
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OFFICE FREEDOM

Founded in 1993 by Richard Smith under its former name SOS Search Office Space, Office Freedom was the first

real estate specialist to provide free global tenant-rep services to clients seeking Flexible Workspace and

Coworking space. Having pioneered this marketplace, it has now advised more than 38,000 clients and currently

lists more than 15,000 offices across six continents. Today, it offers the full spectrum of flexible workplace solutions, including serviced offices, coworking spaces, flexible leases, meeting rooms, virtual offices, day offices and business continuity space.

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