



MRS Covid-19 Guidance: Facilities Used for Face-to-Face Data Collection
Guidance for England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales
7th April 2022

Introduction

The aim of this document is to provide an update on the current government advice from across the UK's four nations and to provide updated practical guidance for practitioners when undertaking face-to-face data collection with participants.

Context

This MRS guidance sets out the conditions for face-to-face data collection activities including the restrictions for in-home.

The MRS guidance may change if government advice is modified.

Research practitioners are required to give priority to local guidance i.e., where research practice takes place.

MRS advice is based on our current understanding of Government guidance and support on COVID-19 which is subject to continuous development. MRS will update and publish accordingly, but it remains the responsibility of research practitioners to keep up to date.

It should be noted the MRS guidance does not replace government advice; it is meant to supplement the official sources with the addition of some research considerations. Remember to continue to check the up-to-date guidance on the relevant Government websites:

- [England](#)
- [Northern Ireland](#)
- [Scotland](#)
- [Wales](#)

New Covid-19 Requirements for the UK's Four Nations

England

On 1st April the UK Government issued new Guidance focusing on reducing the spread of respiratory infections, including Covid-19. The guidance, issued by the UK Health Security Agency, is a principles-based document focused on reducing the risk of catching Covid-19 and passing it on to others. The principles also aim to help to reduce the spread of other respiratory infections, such as flu.

More information is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/reducing-the-spread-of-respiratory-infections-including-covid-19-in-the-workplace>.

If a staff member is unwell with symptoms of a respiratory infection, such as Covid-19, they should follow the guidance for people with symptoms of a respiratory infection such as Covid-19: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/people-with-symptoms-of-a-respiratory-infection-including-covid-19>. Employers, in accordance with their legal obligations, are advised to consider how best to support and enable their workforce to follow this guidance as far as possible.

The actions recommended to reduce the spread of respiratory infections including Covid-19 are:

- Encourage and enable vaccination
- Let fresh air in
- Maintain a clean workplace
- Manage outbreaks in the workplace
- Undertake risk assessments

There is specific guidance for people whose immune system means that they are at higher risk, because they have a reduced ability to fight infections, such as COVID-19:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-people-whose-immune-system-means-they-are-at-higher-risk/covid-19-guidance-for-people-whose-immune-system-means-they-are-at-higher-risk>. Employers may wish to consider the needs of employees at greater risk from COVID-19, including those whose immune system means they are at higher risk of serious illness from COVID-19.

Northern Ireland

The Health and Safety Executive NI (HSENI) and the Public Health Agency (PHA) have produced guidelines for Northern Ireland. These include the advice and guidance for employers regarding working safely with Covid-19:

<https://www.hseni.gov.uk/topic/covid-19-advice-and-guidance-places-work>.

The guidance recommends:

- Undertaking risk assessments and reviews – the HSENI provides a template for this: <https://www.hseni.gov.uk/publications/example-covid-19-workplace-risk-assessment-template>.
- Good ventilation – see guidance: <https://www.hseni.gov.uk/articles/ventilation-covid-19>.
- Face coverings - the use of face coverings is strongly recommended in all indoor settings accessible to the public across Northern Ireland. See guidance: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-face-coverings-guidance>.
- Self-isolating – see guidance: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-self-isolating-and-close-contacts> .

There is specific guidance on protecting vulnerable workers and pregnant workers: <https://www.hseni.gov.uk/articles/advice-protecting-vulnerable-workers-during->

[coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic](#) and <https://www.hseni.gov.uk/articles/pregnancy-and-coronavirus-covid-19-workplace>.

Scotland

The Scottish Government has guidance on safer businesses and workplaces: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-general-guidance-for-safer-workplaces/documents/>. This includes three supporting documents:

- Public health risk assessment tool for businesses
- An operational checklist for the manufacturing sector
- An operational checklist for laboratories and research facilities

The legal requirement to wear facial coverings, unless exempt, in some indoor settings and public transport are due to remain in place until mid-April:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-general-guidance-for-safer-workplaces/pages/face-coverings/>.

Wales

Since 28th March, the Welsh Government announced that face coverings were only legally required in health and care settings. In addition, workplaces and premises open to the public must continue to do coronavirus risk assessment.

From 18th April, all the remaining restrictions in Wales will be lifted if the public health situation remains stable.

The Welsh Government has guidance for employers which is available here: <https://gov.wales/business-and-employers-coronavirus>.

There is specific guidance on protecting people defined on medical grounds as extremely clinically vulnerable: <https://gov.wales/guidance-protecting-people-defined-medical-grounds-clinically-extremely-vulnerable-coronavirus>.

More information is available here: <https://gov.wales/coronavirus>.

Undertaking Face-to-Face Data Collection in Halls, Venues and Viewing Facilities

Scope

The following is MRS current guidance on undertaking face-to-face data collection activities in halls, venues and viewing facilities to avoid potential infection to research practitioners, participants and contractors.

The guidance provides mandatory requirements, interpretation and additional best practice. Members and Company Partners are reminded that this document is designed to complement the MRS Code of Conduct and should not be consulted in isolation.

The MRS Covid-19 guidance does not take precedence over national law. Members and Company Partners responsible for international projects shall take its provisions as a minimum requirement and fulfil any other responsibilities set down in law or by nationally agreed standards.

As specified in the MRS Code, it is the responsibility of research practitioners to keep abreast of any legislation which could affect research and to ensure that all those involved in a project are aware of and agree to abide by the MRS Code of Conduct.

This guidance is not legal advice and should not be relied upon as such. Specific legal advice should be taken in relation to any specific issues.

Principles of the Guidance

- Research is a business activity, not a social activity.
- Research practitioners have a responsibility to protect participants and the reputation of the profession.
- Research practitioners must undertake risk assessments of any proposed face-to-face data collection exercise before beginning the activity.
- In-home face-to-face data collection can take place when the appropriate measures (as detailed within the MRS guidance) have been implemented.

Interpretation of Requirements

When requirements use the word "must" these are mandatory requirements and is a principle or practice that applies the MRS Code of Conduct, which Members and Company Partners are obliged to follow.

The requirements which use the phrase "should" describe implementation and denotes a recommended practice.

"May" or "can" refer to the ability to do something, the possibility of something, as well as granting permission.

MRS Code of Conduct

The following MRS Code of Conduct (2019) rules, which are extracted from the *Business and Professional Ethics* section of the Code, are the fundamental rules from which this guidance has been created:

Rule 6: Members must act honestly in their professional activities.

Rule 7: Members must take reasonable action to ensure that others do not breach or cause a breach of this Code.

Rule 8: Members must not act in a way which might bring discredit on the profession, MRS or its Members.

Rule 9: Members must take all reasonable precautions to ensure that participants are not harmed or adversely affected by their professional activities and ensure that there are measures in place to guard against potential harm.

The rules regarding vulnerable participants are also essential:

Rule 23. Members must take reasonable steps to assess, identify and consider the particular needs of vulnerable people involved in their professional activities.

Rule 24. When working with vulnerable people, Members must ensure that such individuals are capable of making informed decisions and are not unfairly pressured to cooperate with a request to participate and that they are given an opportunity to decline to take part.

In addition, the following data collection rule is key to the guidance, particularly point 28 (a):

Rule 28: Members must take reasonable action when undertaking data collection to ensure all of the following:

- a) that data collection processes are fit for purpose and clients have been advised accordingly;*
- b) that the design and content of data collection processes are appropriate for the audience being analysed;*
- c) that participants are able to provide information in a way that reflects the view they want to express, including don't know/prefer not to say;*
- d) that participants are not led toward a particular point of view;*
- e) that responses and/or data collected are capable of being interpreted in an unambiguous way;*
- f) that any potential use of the personal data is revealed;*
- g) that personal data collected and/or processed is limited to what is relevant; and*
- h) that personal data is stored and transmitted by secure means and only accessible to authorised individuals*

Relevant Definitions

Client: *A client includes any individual, organisation, department or division, including any belonging to the same organisation as an MRS Member, which is responsible for commissioning or applying the results from a project.*

Clinically extremely vulnerable individuals¹: *individuals who have specific underlying health conditions that make them extremely vulnerable to severe illness if they contact Covid-19. For current UK Government definition see: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/people-at-higher-risk/who-is-at-high-risk-from-coronavirus-clinically-extremely-vulnerable/>*

Common areas: *are areas and amenities which are provided for common use of more than one person including building entrances, stairs, lifts, fire escapes, etc.*

Face coverings: *a non-surgical (or other medical grade) mask for facial covering of the mouth and nose, that is made of cloth or other textiles, and through which an individual can breathe e.g., a scarf.*

¹ Alternative terms used by the devolved governments include 'extremely high risk' or 'extremely vulnerable'.

Face-to-face Data Collection: *is any in-person data collection process used to obtain information from or about participants e.g. 1-2-1 interviews, group discussions, hall tests, product testing etc. It includes all face-to-face data collection for research and non-research purposes which are undertaken by research practitioners.*

Facilities: *a location used for undertaking face-to-face data collection e.g. group discussions for research purposes. Facilities include locations such viewing facilities, halls, commercial venues.*

Facilities Staff: *all individuals who are either employed and/or their services retained by a face-to-face data collection facility.*

Incentive: *is any gift, payment or other consideration offered to participants to encourage participation in a project.*

Participant: *is any individual or organisation from or about whom data is collected.*

PPE: *protective equipment which protects users against health and safety risks. It can include items such as safety helmets, face masks, gloves, eye protection, high-visibility clothing, safety footwear, etc.*

Protected Characteristics²: *the groups protected from discrimination in the workplace as defined by the Equality Act 2010. It is against the law to discriminate against anyone because of age, gender reassignment, being married or in a civil partnership, being pregnant or on maternity leave, disability, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation.*

Research: *is the collection, use, or analysis of information about individuals or organisations intended to establish facts, acquire knowledge or reach conclusions. It uses techniques of the applied social, behavioural and data sciences, statistical principles and theory, to generate insights and support decision-making by providers of goods and services, governments, non-profit organisations and the general public.*

Research Practitioners: *includes all individuals within the research supply-chain e.g. researchers, moderators, interviewers, recruiters, mystery shoppers, contractors, freelancers and temporary workers.*

Social Distancing (can be called 'physical distancing'): *limiting face-to-face contact with other individuals by means of keeping space between people. [Note: The distance requirements for social distancing vary between countries.]*

Codeline

The MRS Standards Team are continuing to review and update the MRS guidance as and when required.

If you have any queries about the MRS Code or any of the [MRS' Covid-19 guidance](#) please contact the MRS Standards Team via the MRS Codeline service (codeline@mrs.org.uk).

² See the UK Government website for more details: <https://www.gov.uk/discrimination-your-rights>

Before Participants Attendance in Face-to-face Data Collection Facilities

General

1. Research practitioners must adhere to the appropriate requirements detailed in the [MRS Guidance on undertaking safe face-to-face data collection](#).
2. Research practitioners must adhere to the appropriate government safe working documents (where appropriate).
3. For research practitioners with multiple face-to-face data collection facilities the guidance of the country where facilities are located must be adhered to.
4. If research practitioners wish to undertake data collection in viewing facilities without social distancing and facial coverings, they must ensure that participants are recruited on this basis i.e., informed that the exercise will be without social distancing and facial coverings. Similarly, if data collection is to be with facial coverings and social distancing participants must be recruited on this basis.
5. Once data collection is due to start, research practitioners must undertake agile risk assessments before facial coverings are removed and social distancing is no longer in place. Only if all participants and research practitioners are willing and agree can data collection in viewing facilities be undertaken without social distancing and facial coverings.
6. For data collection undertaken in viewing facilities research practitioners must continue to use facial coverings and social distancing in areas where members of the public may reside e.g., receptions, waiting rooms, common areas, etc.

Facility Owners/Managers

7. Research practitioners responsible for facilities must ensure that facilities used for face-to-face data collection facilities are clean and safe to use by clients, participants and staff.
8. Research practitioners responsible for facilities must complete the relevant risk assessment for each facility which they are responsible for.
9. Research practitioners responsible for facilities must share risk assessments and supporting documents with facility staff.
10. Research practitioners responsible for facilities must ensure that risk assessments and supporting documents are made available to any clients, participants or other visitors who request a copy.
11. Research practitioners responsible for facilities must display the appropriate risk notification posters in a prominent place in facilities and their websites.
12. Research practitioners must consider the outcome of facility risk assessments to determine the appropriate measures to be undertaken, activities to be considered include:

Staff:

- Provide training to all those who work in the facility on the safe working requirements and arrangements within facilities.
- Provide refresher and update training when safe working arrangements change.
- Where possible reduce the number of people each person has contact with by using fixed teams or partnering.
- Provide personal cleaning materials to all those who work in facilities.
- Provide personal storage space to all those who work in facilities.
- Consider which staff are essential for on-site, and only those who are needed to provide services are on-site.
- Consider individual staff risks and requirements, including those classified as [clinically extremely vulnerable](#) and with [protected characteristics](#) (e.g. new or expectant mothers)³.

Communications:

- Communicate with clients, participants and other staff the safety measures and controls in place within a facility, what is expected of them when they are on site and how to report any concerns or safety issues.
- Install posters with the general safety measures, e.g., about personal hygiene, handwashing, etc detailed.
- Install signs and floor and/or wall markings to indicate recommended social distancing.
- Consider the needs of those with [protected characteristics](#), such as those who are hearing or visually impaired.

Cleaning:

- Undertake a deep clean of all facilities.
- Undertake enhanced and/or more frequent cleaning schedules.
- Disinfect taps, showers and other sources of water, ensuring these are flushed through before use and tested if appropriate.
- Undertake frequent cleaning of contact/touch surfaces such as tabletops, work equipment, door handles and handrails.

Equipment:

- Perform maintenance checks and activities on all facility equipment and systems.
- Undertake a deep clean of equipment.

³ In other countries of the UK different terms are used for clinically extremely vulnerable, for example high-risk or extremely vulnerable. Generally, the medical conditions being covered are the same or similar. The appropriate nation guidance should be referred to.

- Establish cleaning procedures for products entering the facility.
- Test fire safety systems, including battery-powered units such as emergency lighting and alarms, which due to lockdown may not have been used for some time.
- Clean support equipment provided for participants e.g., pens, paper, stimulus materials.
- Allocate support equipment (e.g., pens, paper, stimulus materials) for sole use by each participant.

Furniture:

- Position all furniture to ensure social distancing including in public and participant spaces (including outdoor if applicable). The distance requirements for social distancing vary between countries. Social distance is one metre plus unless specified differently.
- Consider the suitability of side-to-side and back-to-back furniture positioning as opposed to face-to-face.
- Consider how individuals move through facilities and how adjustments to furniture could be made to reduce congestion and contact between individuals.

Personal hygiene:

- Provide enhanced personal hygiene facilities, including additional handwashing stations where possible and hand sanitizer points where this is not possible, ensuring these are accessible to all participants including those with disabilities.
- Ensure toilet facilities are managed to facilitate safe use including signage for social distancing, supply of hand sanitisers on entry to toilets (where possible) and the supply of hot water, soap and paper towels in toilet facilities.
- Install and complete visible cleaning schedules for toilets and washroom facilities.
- Provide more waste facilities to enable the safe disposal of disposable hygiene products such as tissues, hand wipes, etc.
- Provide facial coverings and gloves, including instructions on use, for clients, research practitioners, participants and other staff as appropriate and as required.
- Provide PPE only for those face-to-face data collection activities which would have required PPE prior to Covid-19 e.g., whilst serving food.

Incentives:

- Consider processes to reduce the possibility of infection from physical incentives such as incentives being wrapped/sealed or cleaned (if appropriate) before being transferred to participants.
- Consider the use of digital incentives (e.g., e-gift cards) to reduce infection risks.

Food and drink:

- Minimise self-service of food, cutlery and condiments.
- Provide cutlery and condiments only when food is served.
- Follow appropriate government guidance on food safety (such as the [FSA guidance on what you and your staff must do when handling food](#) and the UK Government [Guidance for food businesses on coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)).
- Ensure food preparation and serving areas are frequently and deeply cleaned.
- Minimise numbers of staff working in food preparation and serving areas at any one time.
- Minimise contact between those responsible for food and front of house facility staff (if the staff are different sets of individuals).

Ventilation:

- Maximize fresh air ventilation by keeping windows, vents or doors fully or partially open, if this is an option. When improving ventilation facilities must continue to protect participant confidentiality during data collection.
- If using mechanical ventilation, ensuring that systems are set to maximise fresh air and minimise air recirculation.
- Increase the use of exhaust ventilation (if applicable).
- Identify any poorly ventilated spaces as part of your risk assessment and take steps to improve fresh air flow in these areas. Follow the HSE [guidance](#) on how to identify and improve poorly ventilated space.
- Restart and test specialist equipment (e.g., air conditioners) which may have been unused for longer than usual.

Public areas:

- Manage entrance into public areas, including the possibility of introducing queueing systems, protecting staff, participants, clients and visitors from contact with others including the use of physical structures to ensure social distancing and avoiding congestion.
- Manage arrival times in public areas and consider the possibility and suitability of staggered start times.
- Create public zones to limit the number of people in any one area.
- Reorganize moveable equipment, desks and workstations to enable physical distancing.
- Install Perspex screens where necessary e.g., reception desks.
- Fix doors open to reduce touching or door handles (excluding doors required for fire safety, security or privacy).

- Establish processes for safe entry and exit from facilities.
- Establish one-way systems in corridors, stairways and other common areas and take other actions to mitigate the risks where this is not possible.
- Determine safe ways of using lifts/elevators, including limiting capacity and providing hand sanitizer, ensuring guidance for safe use is communicated both inside and outside of lifts/elevators.

Parking and travel:

- Determine if additional parking or travel facilities can provide including facilities such as bike-racks where possible.

Emergency preparedness:

- Review fire evacuation processes to assess suitability for Covid-19 social distancing and other requirements.
- Provide additional PPE for First Aiders in case of medical emergency and accidents.
- Provide each First Aider within facilities their own First Aid resources i.e., do not allow shared First Aid equipment.

Common areas:

- Coordinate and cooperate with other organizations if any share the same location as any facilities, including with contractors, managing agents, landlords and other tenants, to ensure that appropriate safe working considerations are understood by others in the building.
- Manage entrance into common areas, including the possibility of introducing queueing systems, protecting staff, participants, clients and visitors from traffic and/or contact with others including the use of physical structures such as street furniture to ensure social distancing and avoid congestion.

Use of Third-Party Facilities

13. When research practitioners use third party facilities, they must check the completed risk assessments and supporting documents, and only use facilities where they are satisfied that all reasonable measures, including risk mitigations, have been undertaken.