**Employers encouraged to continue to allow Employee work from home**

On 19th October, the Government gave its latest update on the lifting of Covid-19 related restrictions. It had been hoped that all restrictions would be lifted on Friday, 22nd October but due to the ongoing high number of people getting infected, some of these restrictions have been put on hold.

**So what does this mean for employers and employees?**

An Tánaiste, Leo Varadkar has said that a full return to workplaces may not be possible until next Spring. Public health advice is that employees should be allowed to continue to work from home where possible.

However, An Tánaiste did state that it is possible for employers to return employees to the workplace on a staggered basis. In its letter to Government, NPHET said that working from home played a vital role in containing the spread of Covid-19 since the start of the pandemic. However, this is not always possible, particularly for those working in the community or providing services to the public in an office-type setting.

We have previously written about the Work Safely Protocols but in its latest advice, the Labour Employer Economic Forum stressed the importance of having a “go-to” person, known as the Lead Worker Representative, to help address any concerns employees have about Covid-19.

The group also pointed out that both employees and employers have a shared responsibility to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in the workplace by strictly adhering to the public health advice.

Along with adhering to public health guidance, wearing face coverings where appropriate, maintaining social distancing as well as prompt action if an employee displays symptoms will prevent the spread of Covid-19 in the workplace.

**The role of Antigen Testing**

At the announcement, An Taoiseach, Micheál Martin said that antigen testing will play a bigger role in managing Covid-19. He outlined that, in future, if a person is deemed to be a close contact of a confirmed case and are fully vaccinated, they will be sent an antigen test. Up to now, the advice has been that there is no need to be tested if not displaying any symptoms. For employers, this may also help support the return to the workplace.

**Role of Lead Worker Representative (LWR)**

Every workplace should appoint at least one LWR who is in charge of ensuring that COVID-19 measures are strictly adhered to in their place of work. The number of representatives appointed will ideally be proportionate to the number of workers.

Employees can engage with their employer through the Lead Worker in relation to concerns in the workplace. If their concerns are inadequately dealt with in relation to the implementation of the Protocol within a workplace, an employee may raise these concerns with the Workplace Contact Unit of the Health and Safety Authority (HAS), who will review all complaints and will follow up as appropriate

**Health & Safety**

The LWR, together with the COVID-19 response management team, should support the implementation of the public health measures set out in the Work Safely Protocols as well as ensuring the Organisation’s Covid-19 Response Plan is clearly communicated to all. The identity of the person or persons appointed should be clearly communicated within the workplace. **They should also receive the relevant and necessary training from their employer.**

Given the absence of the majority of employees from the workplace for the past 18 months, we recommend that Organisations look to retraining employees on aspects of Health & Safety – obviously including Covid-19 prevention.

Employers should also pay particular attention to employees who have been onboarded during lockdown and refresh their induction training plans and procedures.

**Reminding employees of entitlements**

It is also reminding workers that they are entitled to the Government’s enhanced illness benefit payment of €350 a week for both employees and the self-employed once they are certified by a registered medical practitioner as being diagnosed with Covid-19 or a probable source of infection of Covid-19.

If your Organisation needs support in devising and implementing appropriate training programmes, please get in touch with our team at Adare Human Resource Management.

***Adare Human Resource Management is a team of expert-led Employment Law, Industrial Relations and best practice Human Resource Management consultants. For more information call (01) 561 3594* email** [**adarechambers@adarehrm.ie**](mailto:adarechambers@adarehrm.ie)**.**