



RPE and Protecting against Covid-19

As the construction industry returns to work, we are now debating the best practices to help protect them from the Coronavirus. One hot topic of conversation is whether the use of face mask can protect against the transmission of Covid-19.

Current guidelines from The World Health Organization (WHO) do not recommend the wearing of face masks; the preferred approach is to ensure social distancing and good hygiene measures. WHO currently states that only two groups of people should wear protective masks, those who are:

- Sick and showing symptoms
- Caring for people suspected to have Coronavirus (*health workers*)

It goes on to say that medical masks should be reserved for healthcare workers. The wearing of masks is not recommended for the general public because:

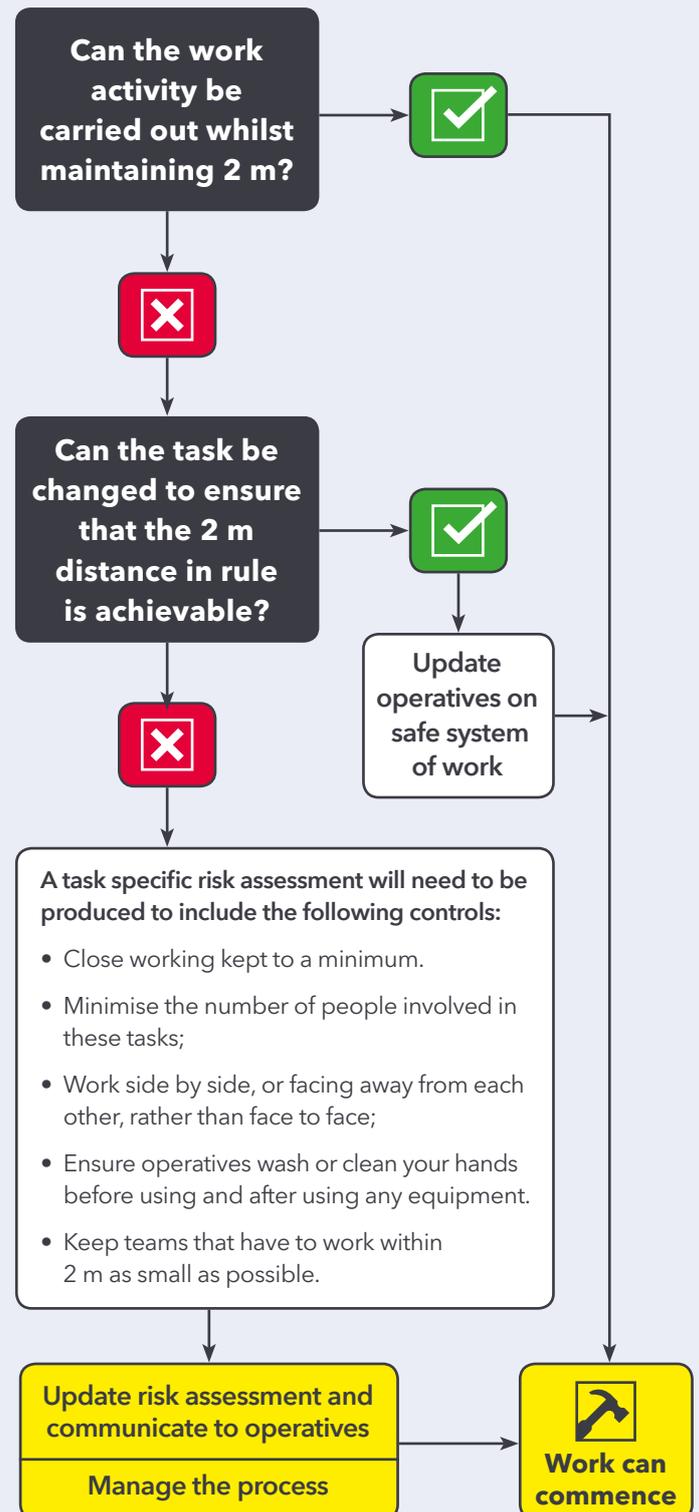
- They can be contaminated by other people's coughs and sneezes, or when putting them on or removing them.
- Frequent hand-washing and social distancing are more effective.
- They might offer a false sense of security.

In the roofing industry we rely on Respiratory Protective Equipment (RPE) for many different tasks, like protection from dust, but not for virus protection. Currently, all RPE for construction work must be CE marked. There has been no change to that required standard. Filtering Face Piece masks (FFP) have a continuous wear time of less than one hour, after which the wearer should take a break.

As the global shortage of PPE continues, there will be issues around supplies of FFP3 masks and so you may need to prioritise or, through risk assessment, determine what other controls and time exposure limitations could be implemented to manage the risk of operatives working in an environment that requires the use of a face fit mask.

The Construction Leadership Council's (CLC) Site Operating Procedures (SOP) sets out hierarchy of controls where close working cannot be avoided. If it's not possible to eliminate, reduce or isolate the risk, then unless the activity is essential, you should consider whether the activity should continue.

If the activity is essential and there is no other way of maintaining social distancing, then you should consider whether it should continue. The flow chart right will help you make an informed decision when planning tasks where operatives will have to work in close proximity.



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