



Occupational Health and the Coronavirus

A complete guide to keeping your people healthy during the pandemic



Featuring case studies by



Department
for Work &
Pensions

ASDA



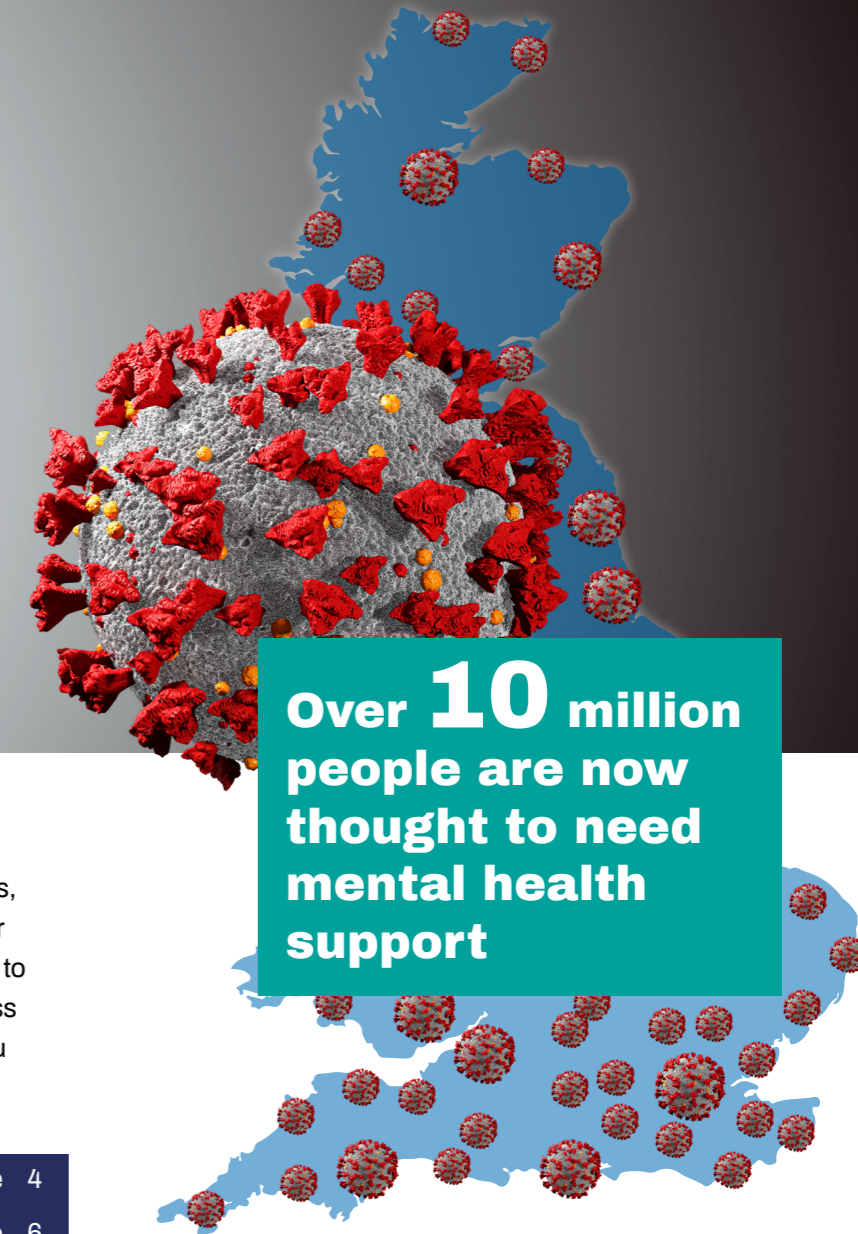
**HM PRISON
SERVICE**

Public Sector Prisons

The impact of the pandemic on the health of the workforce cannot be underestimated



Dr Bernard Yew,
Medical Director,
PAM Group



Over **10** million people are now thought to need mental health support

Although just over 145,000 people in the UK have been hospitalised with Covid-19 (the infectious lung disease associated with the coronavirus)¹, more than 10 million people are now thought to be in need of mental health support, due to the extreme measures put in place to limit spread of the virus².

Front-line workers are experiencing burnout, while post-traumatic stress and musculoskeletal issues have increased significantly, with a third of workers (37%) experiencing new back pain since they began to work remotely³.

Add to that the impact of delays in access to testing on short-term absence and the emergence of Long Covid, a condition causing some people to become debilitated with crippling fatigue, and it's clear that it's never been more important for employers to proactively manage the health of their workforce.

Planning ahead

As we move out of reacting to the situation towards proactively planning how best to sustain the health of the workforce during the challenges ahead, here at PAM Group we are receiving numerous requests from employers asking how we can support them in this endeavour.

We have developed a number of solutions from online delivery of mental health services to fatigue assessments for workers at risk of burnout to webinars for homeworkers on how to protect their backs. Meanwhile, our drive-through coronavirus testing is enabling employers to reduce short-term absence linked to symptoms, but not the virus.

We are also supporting vulnerable employees and people affected by Long Covid, while our clinical team is carrying out return-to-work assessments, based on the latest guidelines. This is to help people now deemed safe to come out of shielding to do so, in a way that addresses their anxieties and helps them to recover loss of physical and mental health before they return.

Best practice

By working alongside HR and OH professionals, to support employees with every aspect of their wellbeing during this crisis, we have been able to pull together some best practice insights, across each of the following areas, which we hope you will find helpful:

• Catch people at risk of burnout	page 4
• Keep homeworkers in good health	page 6
• Enable people to return to work	page 8
• Reduce short-term absence	page 10
• Rehabilitate traumatised employees	page 12
• Address mental health issues	page 14
• Help people with Long Covid	page 16

We hope you find this guide useful for supporting your people to stay healthy and productive during the pandemic, and welcome the opportunity to talk to you about your needs.

Catch people at risk of burnout

Ensure fatigued workers are helped to improve their health before they burnout

After months of high pressure and upheaval, frontline workers are at risk of burnout⁴. Working parents are still exhausted after extending their days in unhealthy ways to cope with school closures. Meanwhile, anyone who has had to find new ways to deliver services online, or been involved in a restructuring or redundancy programme, is now feeling more than a little tired.

Even so, with more than a third of employers planning to make staff redundant⁵, few people will have the confidence to admit they need support. This puts the onus on employers to help people to help themselves, before exhaustion has a chance to develop into chronic fatigue or depression.

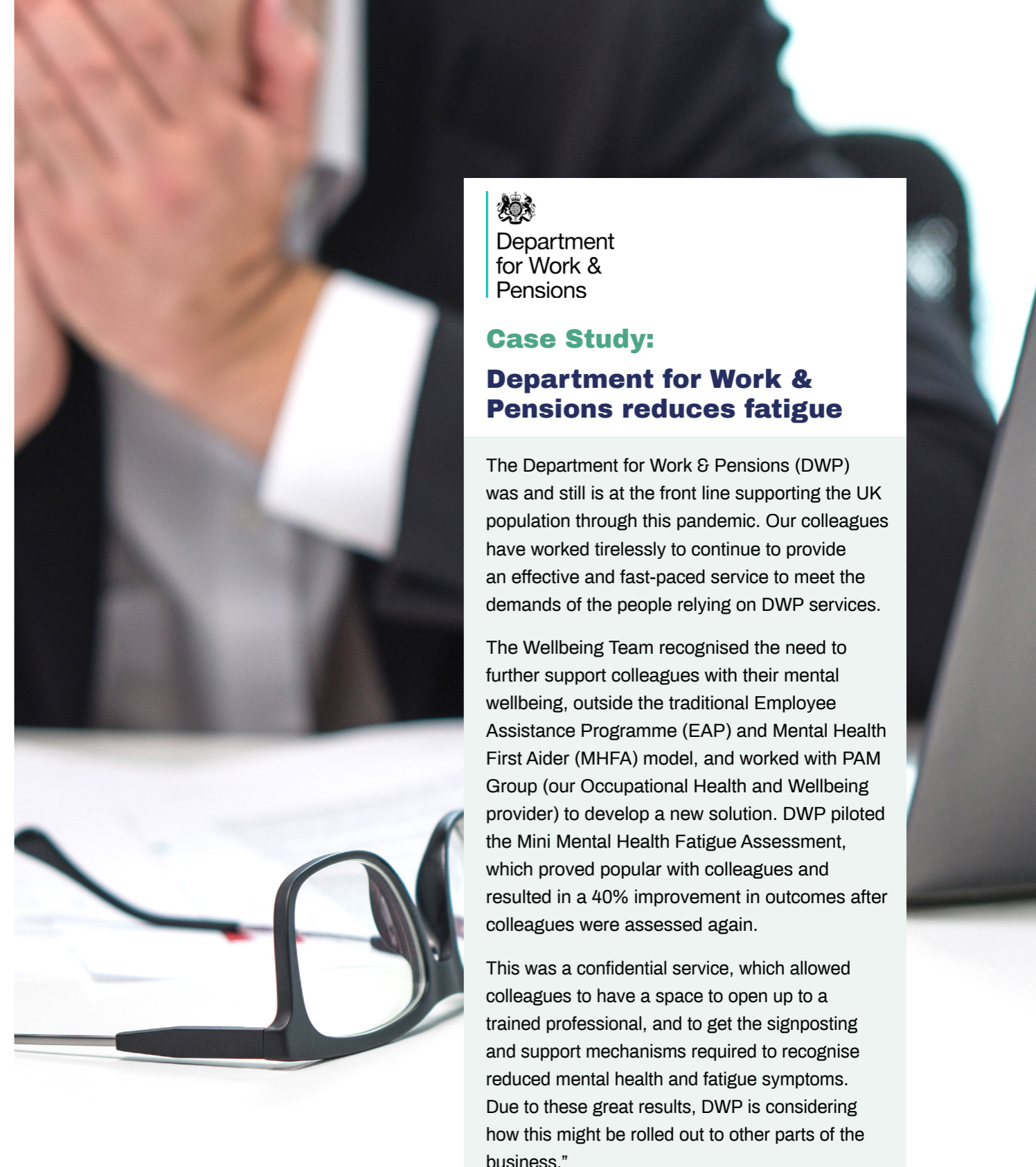
Reduce fatigue

Instead of waiting for people to become sick with fatigue before support services kick in, make sure managers are regularly checking in with people on a one-to-one basis, to ask how they are. It's also important to educate everyone about the symptoms of fatigue and ways to take preventative action.

Symptoms of fatigue:

- Chronic tiredness or sleepiness
- Slowed reflexes and responses
- Forgetfulness and lack of focus
- Lack of concentration and memory
- Dizziness and headaches
- Sore, weak or aching muscles
- Moodiness, such as irritability
- Impaired decision-making

Our Occupational Health solutions include Mini Mental Health Fatigue Assessments to allow people to talk to a clinician in confidence about the signs of fatigue and how they're feeling, so they can be provided with coping strategies bespoke to their situation. This includes how they can talk to their manager to reduce the pressure they're under and access other support services in place, such as counselling via the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), specialist support through stepped care or workshops on managing fatigue.



Department
for Work &
Pensions

Case Study:

Department for Work & Pensions reduces fatigue

The Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) was and still is at the front line supporting the UK population through this pandemic. Our colleagues have worked tirelessly to continue to provide an effective and fast-paced service to meet the demands of the people relying on DWP services.

The Wellbeing Team recognised the need to further support colleagues with their mental wellbeing, outside the traditional Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) and Mental Health First Aider (MHFA) model, and worked with PAM Group (our Occupational Health and Wellbeing provider) to develop a new solution. DWP piloted the Mini Mental Health Fatigue Assessment, which proved popular with colleagues and resulted in a 40% improvement in outcomes after colleagues were assessed again.

This was a confidential service, which allowed colleagues to have a space to open up to a trained professional, and to get the signposting and support mechanisms required to recognise reduced mental health and fatigue symptoms. Due to these great results, DWP is considering how this might be rolled out to other parts of the business.”



TOP TIP

Give people 'permission' to look after themselves, by encouraging everyone to switch off after work and asking managers not to send emails at night or the weekend.

“The Mini Mental Health Fatigue Assessment proved popular with colleagues and resulted in a 40% improvement in outcomes after colleagues were assessed again.”

Keep homeworkers healthy

Help your homeworkers to stay healthy and avoid preventable issues

Many individuals whose only form of exercise was walking to the train station or moving around for meetings at work are no longer doing any kind of exercise. More than a third of workers have experienced back pain since they began working remotely, with 58% of people saying they have not been given any advice on how to work ergonomically from home⁶.

The number of people engaging in 'high-risk' alcohol consumption has doubled⁷ and nearly one in two people (48%) have put on weight during lockdown⁸, heightening their risk of developing cardiovascular problems and becoming adversely affected by coronavirus.



Keep people healthy

Health assessments are a highly valued employee benefit, which can provide valuable management data on where best to direct your occupational health spend. Our Mini MOT is a cost-effective solution that looks at everything from cholesterol and diabetes risks to heart health and body composition (weight, BMI and waist-to-hip ratio).

Once people 'know their numbers', they can be helped and motivated to reduce their health risks, with access to information on how to make and sustain better lifestyle choices, via our employee portal. Alternatively, bespoke wellbeing advice and recommendations can be delivered direct to their phone, via PAM Life, our employee wellbeing app.

58%

say they have not been given any advice on how to work ergonomically from home⁹



Prevent MSK issues

Our musculoskeletal workshops can help people to understand how to set up their workstation at home, correct their posture and protect their back to prevent the development of avoidable musculoskeletal injuries.

Our physiotherapy information line (PHIL) can quickly connect anyone with a musculoskeletal condition with an experienced physiotherapist, to obtain advice and even exercises to facilitate a return to work, or more comfortable home-based working.



TOP TIP
Research how your people are putting their health at risk, and base wellbeing initiatives on this, to prevent them from becoming sick.

Support mental health

When it comes to dealing with issues like the sharp increase in alcohol, it's not enough to address this in itself as this is often a side-effect of people attempting to block out feelings of anxiety, isolation or depression.

Any occupational health programme must also look at the underlying mental health issues, such as stress and anxiety, driving unhealthy behaviours, and equip people with the skills needed to tackle these, rather than looking at physical issues in isolation (see page 8).

Enable people to return to work

Enable people returning to work, from shielding or furlough, to overcome physical and mental health conditions

As the virus has evolved, so have the guidelines surrounding who should be shielding. For example, some people with asthma, initially told they were at risk, have since been advised they no longer need to shield, after NICE guidelines on what it means to be a 'severe asthmatic' were published during the pandemic⁹.

However, after months of being told to stay home to protect their life, the invitation to return to the workplace can be daunting to those who were told they were most vulnerable. Those who have been on furlough for many months can feel equally anxious about returning, with many individuals likely to have experienced some physical or mental health conditions.

Help people return

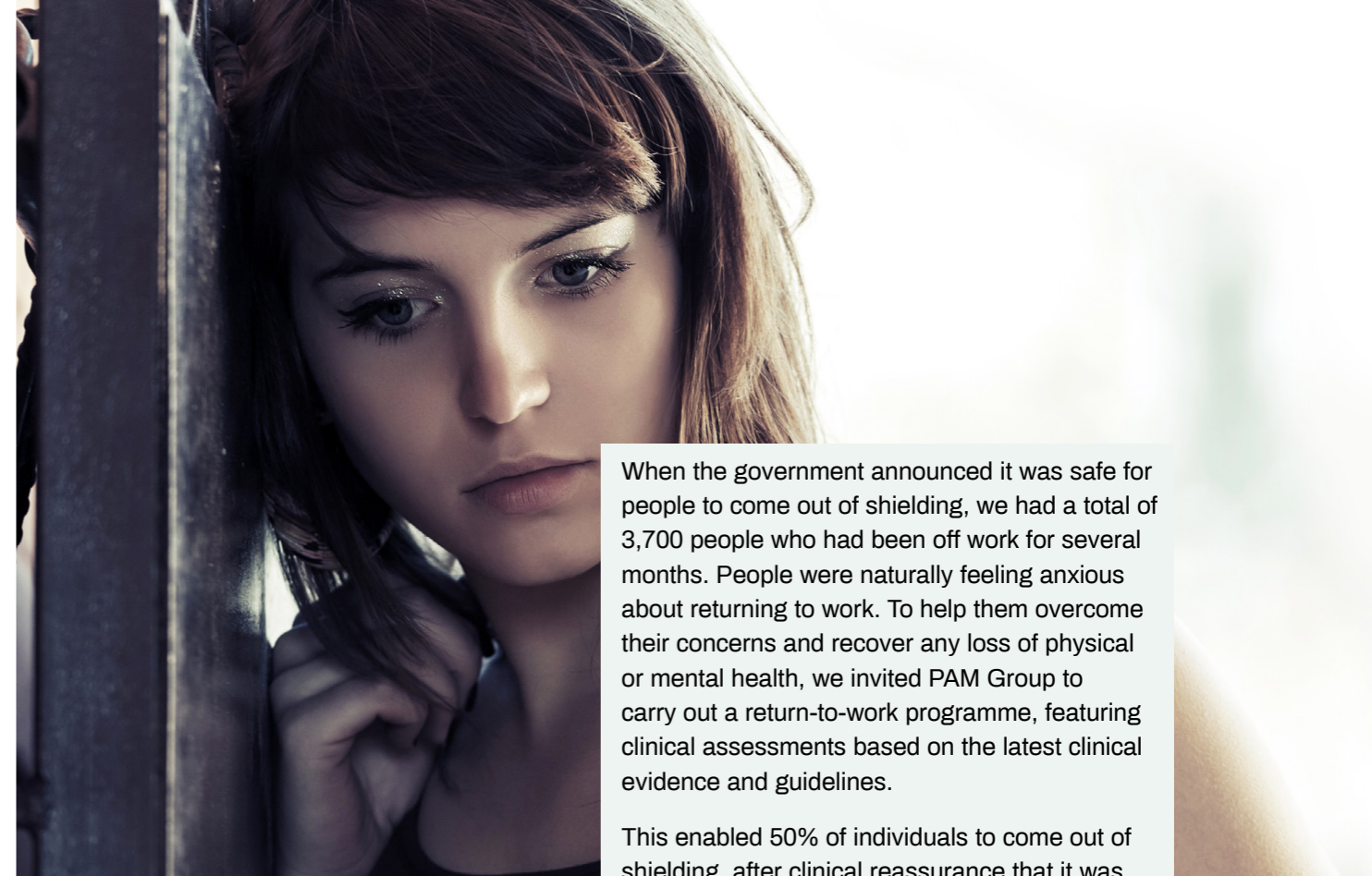
Return-to-work assessments, based on the latest science and guidelines, can be useful for identifying who is now safe to return to work and how best to do this in a way that helps them to overcome anxieties and recover any loss of physical and mental health before they return.

These also take into account revised clinical guidelines on which groups are most at risk, depending on the overall rate of infection across the country and local lockdown measures, helping you to update your occupational health policies as needed.

Coronaphobia is the fear of catching the virus when returning to 'normal' activities, such as returning to the physical workplace or using public transport.

Symptoms include:

- feeling sick to the stomach
- rapid breathing
- pounding heart
- sweating
- trembling
- changes to appetite
- muscle tension
- trouble sleeping
- fatigue
- panic attacks



When the government announced it was safe for people to come out of shielding, we had a total of 3,700 people who had been off work for several months. People were naturally feeling anxious about returning to work. To help them overcome their concerns and recover any loss of physical or mental health, we invited PAM Group to carry out a return-to-work programme, featuring clinical assessments based on the latest clinical evidence and guidelines.

This enabled 50% of individuals to come out of shielding, after clinical reassurance that it was safe to do so, and 48% to return after some further intervention (Average 4 week).

Typically, these include physiotherapy recommendations, to help them regain strength and reconditioning after months of reduced activity, or counselling or cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), to help them address anxiety and other mental health issues that had developed after months of being isolated at home.

Employees were grateful for the support, which provided clinical reassurance as to whether or not it was safe for them to come back and signposting to further rehabilitation services from PAM Group if needed. The business also benefited from getting 98% of our workforce back to work but, more importantly, providing individuals with fast-tracked rehabilitative services to improve physical and mental health wellbeing.

ASDA

Case Study:

Asda helps people who are shielding return to work

“The return-to-work programme carried out by PAM Group provided individuals with fast-tracked rehabilitative services to improve physical and mental health wellbeing.”



TOP TIP Help people to feel less anxious by reassuring people their safety will continue to come first and sharing the rationale that has gone into coronavirus safety measures.

Reduce short-term absence

Don't let confusion about symptoms or a lack of testing keep people out of work

Short-term absence is now a huge issue for employers, with the time taken for some people to access free coronavirus testing causing people who are worried they might have symptoms to self-isolate for 10 days, when they don't actually have the virus.

Many people are also confused about symptoms, putting the onus on employers to safeguard their workforce, in a way that also prevents unnecessary absence.

Set up your own testing station

With the widely reported problems with access to free coronavirus testing causing many employees to remain absent longer than needed, we've been helping employers to set up their own drive or walk-through coronavirus testing stations, in onsite car parks, for employees to get tested and have their results delivered within 24 hours.

The benefit to employees is that when there is no NHS testing available, or they are being asked to drive hundreds of miles to get a test, they can have the reassurance of a local test, paid for by



PAM Day One is a same-day absence referral service to support your colleagues and advise managers on short-term absence



their employer. The benefit to employers is that symptomatic employees who don't actually have coronavirus can return to work within 4-5 days, halving the absence that would have resulted from having to self-isolate for 10 days.

Reduce short-term absence

By introducing Day One absence management, you can ensure anyone with symptoms can be helped to understand whether or not they actually have coronavirus. For example, by reassuring them that a sneeze or cough in itself isn't indicative of coronavirus, if it's not continuous (coughing a lot for more than an hour, or three or more coughing episodes in one hour).

If they do have symptoms of coronavirus (see box), our Day One Absence Management is provided by nurses who can also give advice on managing the condition, emotional reassurance and advice on how best to get a test at the current time. Three follow-up calls are typically made until the employee returns to work, with their manager updated after each touchpoint.

Support BAME employees

Since the pandemic began, it has been clear that people of some ethnic backgrounds are at greater risk from the coronavirus than others, with black men of African background experiencing a death rate that is 2.7 times higher than that of white males. For females, the highest death rates is among those of black Caribbean ethnic background, almost twice that of white females¹⁰.

In response, we are providing BAME Race & Wellbeing educational workshops, to help your BAME workers understand their risks and what action they need to take, with counselling support also available for those who are feeling particularly anxious about their risk of contracting Covid. Our Day One absence management can also provide them with emotional reassurance and advice on how to get a test as quickly as possible, should they develop symptoms.

CORONAVIRUS OR SOMETHING ELSE?

Source: CDC, Mayo Clinic

Cold or Allergies

- itchy eyes
- stuffy nose
- sneezing

Flu or Coronavirus

- fever
- fatigue
- body aches
- cough
- worsening symptoms

Coronavirus

- shortness of breath
- history of travel
- exposure

Symptoms and risks vary from person to person. Always check with your doctor.

Rehabilitate traumatised employees

The pandemic has been challenging for everyone, but for some individuals it's been deeply traumatic

From the tens of thousands of frontline health workers the British Medical Association is predicting will become sick with PTSD¹¹, to the rape victim who can't wear a mask, due to her post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) being triggered when her mouth and nose are covered, many individuals are now struggling with symptoms of trauma brought on or triggered by the pandemic.

The four main cluster symptoms of trauma:

- Avoiding things that put you in mind of the thing that traumatised you
- Hyper-vigilance, making you feel jumpy or interrupting your sleep
- Flashbacks and constantly replaying events in your mind
- Low mood and feelings of sadness or not feeling anything at all

Not everyone exposed to a traumatic event will go on to develop lasting symptoms of trauma, while some people exposed to seemingly less traumatic events, such as an aggressive outburst by a customer, might go onto develop PTSD, depending on their past history.

Reduce trauma

Support people exposed to trauma by giving them upfront education about the symptoms that are a natural reaction to any unnatural event they've been exposed to. Adaptive therapies such as Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR) can also often be used to rehabilitate employees who would be costly to replace otherwise, in as little as three sessions.

EMDR works by moving the sights, sounds and smells associated with a trauma, which the individual has become stuck in processing, over to the cognitive side of the brain by using bilateral stimulus, such as eye movements, or tactile tapping. This helps the brain to realise: 'I am safe now'. Or, if the person was stuck in feelings of guilt: 'I did all that I could.'



TOP TIP
If managers are concerned, they should give the person an opportunity to talk in a confidential space but avoid talking about the trauma in detail as this can embed it.

Case Study:

HM Prison & Probation Service provides trauma support

“Our staff have benefited enormously from the trauma and critical incident support delivered by PAM. It has sign-posted them to relevant therapies, so they can recover and thrive at work.”

The restrictions brought in to reduce spread of the coronavirus throughout prisons have been challenging for both prisoners and staff. Prisoners living in even more restrictive regimes, with a ban on family visits for a time, and completely new ways of working have all contributed to new challenges for staff.

Critical incidents, such as assaults on Prison Officers and Operational Support Grade staff, require appropriate levels of support, with PAM Wellbeing, our trauma and critical incident partner providing staff support. We have had to change the way we work with PAM, with the majority of debriefs now carried out virtually, so people don't miss out on the help and assistance this provides, by creating a safe place to look at impacts, reactions and symptoms.

Due to Covid, PAM has had to develop a virtual way of delivering important trauma therapies, such as Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR). This has been essential to ensuring we can continue to provide our staff with a crucial therapy for supporting them to recover from exposure to a traumatic event, so they can continue to deliver their duties and stay in their post.

Address mental health issues

The coronavirus pandemic hasn't just been a physical health crisis, it's also triggered a mental health crisis.

One in five adults (22 per cent) who had no previous experience of mental health problems now say their mental health is 'poor' or 'very poor', and two-thirds (65 per cent) of people who had a pre-existing mental health problem say it has become worse¹² during the crisis.

We're also seeing a worrying increase in suicide. Older men, aged 45-49, are particularly at risk¹³, due to fear of redundancy and relationship breakdown, after the strain of living in close proximity caused many relationships to fail. Women and younger workers are increasingly likely to be struggling to cope with feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Anxiety is defined as a general feeling of unease, such as worry or fear, that can be mild or severe. It's typically associated with a number of physical symptoms, including:

- Feeling sick to your stomach
- Rapid breathing or shortness of breath
- Pounding heart or increased heart rate
- Sweating, trembling or shaking
- Loss of appetite or comfort eating
- Muscle tension or pain
- Weakness or fatigue
- Trouble sleeping
- Panic attacks
- Headaches

Create a caring culture

Employee benefits, such as an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), can provide access to confidential counselling, from as little as the price of a cup of coffee per person a year (depending on the size of the organisation and nature of work). They have a key role to play in making people feel cared for, but the culture of the organisation and ability of managers to role-model looking after wellbeing also matters.

Managers must show the caring face of the organisation and humanise the workplace in a way that might have been sadly lacking until now. This isn't about asking managers to become

counsellors or advisers. It is about encouraging managers to help people acknowledge how they're feeling so they can encourage them to use the support services already in place. Managers can also use our EAP, PAM Assist, to get advice on how best to support anyone they're concerned about, as well as general advice on managing the mental health of their teams and themselves.

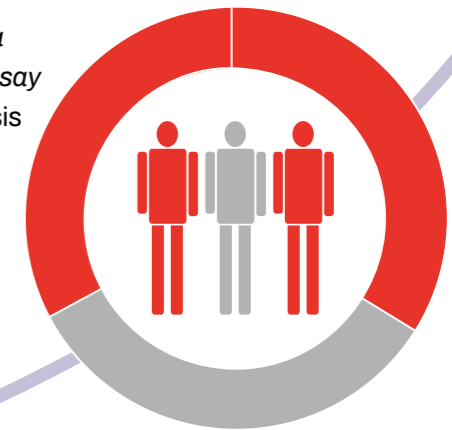
Normalise anxiety

Anxiety is now likely to overcome stress as the number one cause of absence, with 37 per cent of people in the UK – equating to 19 million – now suffering from high anxiety¹⁴, a general feeling of unease associated with symptoms such as feeling sick to your stomach, rapid breathing, pounding heart, trembling, fatigue, trouble sleeping, panic attacks and headaches.

To help reduce anxiety levels, employers need to reassure people it's OK to feel anxious at this time, and educate people how to recognise and manage the symptoms. Tactics such as group workshops, mindfulness and physical exercise have all been

2/3rds

...(65 per cent) of people who had a pre-existing mental health problem say it has become worse during the crisis



1 in 5

...adults (22 per cent) who had no previous experience of mental health problems now say their mental health is 'poor' or 'very poor'



proven to be effective at reducing anxiety levels. We also offer workshops on normalising anxiety, managing mental health and boosting resilience.



Restoring Mental Health

How to reduce the prevalence of mental health issues linked to the coronavirus

Download

www.pamwellbeing.co.uk/restoring-mental-health



TOP TIP

To help reduce anxiety levels, reassure people it's OK to feel anxious and educate people how to recognise and manage the symptoms.

Help individuals with Long Covid

The number of people struggling with symptoms of Long Covid is increasing

For most people, Covid-19 is a mild or unnoticeable disease, but some estimates suggest that 10% of Covid patients may still be experiencing symptoms more than three weeks after infection, and as many as 60,000 people could be suffering from Long Covid symptoms¹⁵ (see box), which can include fatigue, breathlessness and joint pain, after more than three months.

Furthermore, Long Covid is not just being experienced by those who required hospital treatment, but also people who experienced mild symptoms of Covid-19. Half the people in a study in Dublin were still experiencing fatigue 10 weeks after being infected with coronavirus. A third were physically unable to return to work¹⁶.

Current services include:

- Management of breathlessness
- Management of fatigue
- Improving physical function after Covid
- Managing anxiety and depression
- Managing concentration issues

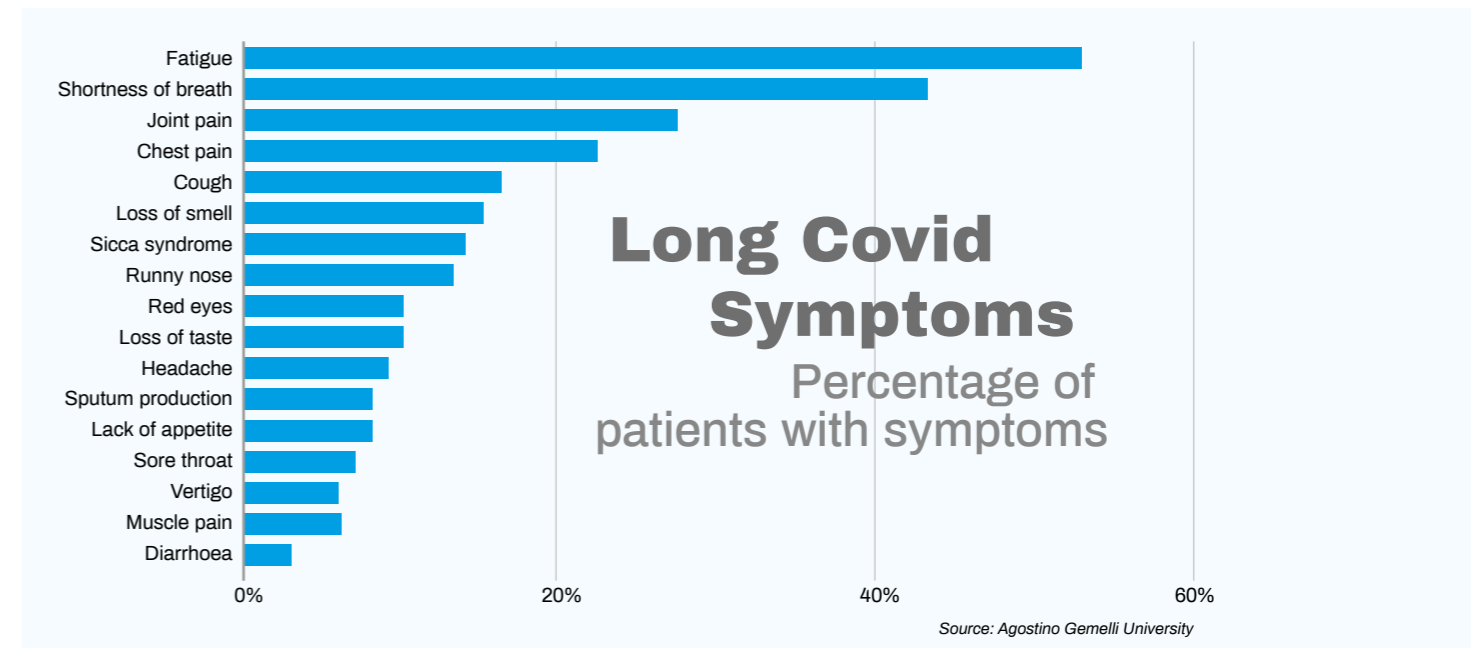
Supporting employees

One of the best ways to support employees struggling with Long Covid is to create a facilitated 'listening circle', for people to share their experiences and understand that this is a real condition and something they are not alone in experiencing.

The session should cover the long-term effects of this disease and allow people to share their experiences and coping strategies, with clear signposting to further support. For example, medical implications (relating to the heart, lungs or gut) are better supported through occupational health or community healthcare professional services. People struggling with fatigue, anxiety, 'brain fog' or musculoskeletal (MSK) issues can be provided with further one-to-one counselling and support.

What is brain fog?

Brain fog is a side-effect of the chronic fatigue often associated with Long Covid. It reduces cognitive function, especially memory and the ability to think clearly.



Dedicated case management

Our multi-disciplinary occupational health team is actively working with employers on this issue, providing physiological and psychological rehabilitation to employees, based on the latest evidence and guidelines. This includes evolving NICE guidelines on topics ranging from how

physiotherapy can be used to support pulmonary rehabilitation to the most effective ways of treating Long Covid.

Younger workers

Although younger individuals have largely avoided the direct health impact of the coronavirus, some are still experiencing Long Covid symptoms, such as loss of taste and smell, and risk being catastrophically hit by the collateral damage wrought by the crisis in other ways. Not only is this group most likely to be experiencing feelings of loneliness and isolation, they are most at risk of pay reductions, losing their jobs and being evicted from rental property.

To help employers deal with the 80% rise in mental health problems that has occurred within this group during this pandemic, we can provide counselling and access to information and legal helplines, through our employee assistance programme, PAM Assist. We also give wellness and occupational health advice on how best to support younger workers at this time.

- ✓ Do encourage them to get mental health support
- ✓ Do direct them towards appropriate healthcare professionals
- ✓ Do adjust their working conditions for them to return

DO

+

- ✗ Don't push them to be physically active too quickly
- ✗ Don't expect them to manage their condition unsupported
- ✗ Don't let them become 'out of sight, out of mind'


DON'T

—


How can PAM Group help?

We can help you to protect the health of your people during the pandemic in the following ways


Fatigue Support

 Prevent burnout and help people to overcome fatigue with our Mini Fatigue Assessments, which provide expert confidential advice, tailored to their situation. Support people experiencing chronic fatigue, or Long Covid, with listening circles and rehabilitation.


Health Screening

 Motivate people to understand their health risks and make positive lifestyle changes with our range of executive health screenings or Mini Wellbeing MOTs. Health screening can be delivered remotely or onsite and offered as part of existing benefits packages.


PAM Life App

 Help individuals to boost their physical and mental health with interactive wellbeing advice and recommendations delivered direct to their phone. Advice is bespoke to their individual health data to help them set and achieve goals, from losing weight to mastering mindfulness skills.

Mental Health Workshops


 Pick and choose from our range of mental health workshops for employees and managers. These workshops, on topics including Mental Health Awareness, Managing Anxiety and Practising Resilience & Self-care, can be delivered online to educate your entire workforce at once.

PAM Assist (EAP)


 Free and confidential helpline to help people deal with pressure at home or work. Round-the-clock access to clinical and professional advisors, who can provide counselling and support with work, relationships, stress, anxiety, health concerns, family care, legal issues, finances and debt.




PAM Day One

 Start-to-finish absence management to support employees back into work. Calls answered by PAM-employed qualified nurses, to direct individuals to OH, physio, counselling or EAP services and keep managers updated. Service can be upgraded to include next-day coronavirus testing.


Physio Information Line (PHIL)

 Quickly connect people with musculoskeletal (MSK) problems to our helpline staffed by experienced physios, who can provide advice and exercises to help facilitate a return to work. PAM Group can also provide physio and MSK webinars and workshops, tailored to your organisation's needs.

Return-to-Work

 Return-to-work assessments, to help people who are now able to come out of shielding overcome their anxiety and recover loss of physical and mental health before they return. Based on latest clinical guidelines and integrated with rehabilitation services to prevent unnecessary absence.

PTSD Rehabilitation

 Help people to overcome post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) with EMDR or CBT treatment. Prevent people from developing trauma with trauma awareness workshops and critical incident management planning, counselling and helplines.



Get in touch today

 info@pamgroup.co.uk

 www.pamgroup.co.uk

 01925 227 000

Sources

1. *Coronavirus (Covid-19) in the UK*, ONS, 8 Oct 2020
2. *Up to 10 million Brits could need mental health support after the pandemic*, Centre for Mental Health, Oct 2020
3. *More than a third of workers suffer back pain*, Personnel Today, Oct 2020
4. *NHS staff struggle with burnout*, Independent, Oct 2020
5. *More than a third of UK employers planning to make staff redundant*, Guardian, Oct 2020
6. *More than a third of workers suffer back pain*, Personnel Today, Oct 2020
7. *High risk drinking doubles during lockdown*, Independent, Sep 2020
8. *Lockdown and weight gain*, BBC, Jun 2020
9. *Asthma UK admits earlier shielding advice 'caused confusion'*, Pulse, April 2020
10. *Ethnic contrasts in deaths involving the coronavirus (COVID-19)*, Office for National Statistics, Oct 2020
11. *Trauma of coronavirus frontline*, Huff Post, Apr 2020
12. *Restoring Mental Health*, PAM Wellbeing, July 2020
13. *Restoring Mental Health*, PAM Wellbeing, July 2020
14. *How to support employees with increasing health anxiety*, HR magazine, August 2020
15. *NHS to offer 'long covid' sufferers help*, NHS England, Oct 2020
16. *Persistent fatigue following SARS-CoV-2 infection is common*, BMJ, July 2020

PAM Group Limited is a company registered in England and Wales.

Registration number: 7475231. Registered Office: Holly House, 73-75 Sankey Street, Warrington, WA1 1SL.