WORKING FROM HOME DURING COVID-19
# Table of Contents:

Telecommuting/Home-Based Workers .......................................................................................... 3  
- Potential Risks.......................................................................................................................... 3

**Physical Work-Site** .................................................................................................................. 4

**Other Work Site Issues** ........................................................................................................... 8  
- Cyber Threats............................................................................................................................. 8
- Comfort, Productivity and Social Considerations ...................................................................... 8
- Work Routine and Time Management ....................................................................................... 9
- Nutrition....................................................................................................................................... 9
- Breaks.......................................................................................................................................... 9

**Home Based Office Safety Checklist** ..................................................................................... 10
Telecommuting/Home-Based Workers

The trend toward telecommuting and utilizing remotely located workers is expected to continue after the COVID-19 pandemic. While beneficial in many ways, the move toward home-based workers is not without some additional risk and exposure to the employer. The same hazards presented by working in a physical “main” office are also present in a home-based office setting. However, given the alternate physical location and reduced access to support operations, some of these hazards may be exacerbated or modified.

Potential Risks

Telecommuting and teleworking arrangements can vary from a formal, on-going, work-from-home agreement to an occasional project based work assignment. While beneficial to both employer and employee, permitting employees to work offsite (particularly from their homes) can create unexpected and unanticipated liability for employers. Potential liabilities to employers who allow telecommuting include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential Liability</th>
<th>Considerations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Workers’ Compensation** | • Regardless of location, employee injuries sustained in the course and scope of employment are generally considered compensable, however this varies based on state WC laws.  
• Factors to consider include:
  1. Time and location of injury – did the incident occur in a designated work area of the home and during normal working hours?  
  2. Task being performed – was the worker engaged in work-related tasks, or taking care of personal business or taking a break?  
  3. Employer’s home office safety requirements – does the employer have a telecommuting policy that includes home office safety policies? |
| **Auto** | • Use of a personal vehicle for a business related need such as a trip to the post office, picking up office supplies, dropping off a package at a shipper, etc., could be considered business travel.  
• Typically, in a hired/non-owned auto incident, the employee’s personal auto insurance coverage would respond first, however in the event of a serious accident, personal limits could be exhausted, potentially exposing the company’s auto insurance. |
| **Third Party** | • Customers or clients sustaining injury at an employee’s home while meeting there for business could result in a claim being made under the employer’s general liability policy.  
• Vendors or package delivery service workers injured while conducting business at a worker’s home could potentially present a liability claim to the worker’s or employer’s general liability policy. |
### Cyber Risk
- Access to company and customer information and data, particularly sensitive or proprietary information.
- Firewalls, virus scanners and similar security measures between telecommuters and company internal network will provide added layers of safety.

### Discrimination
- Discrimination laws apply equally to home-based workers.
- Clearly defining the telecommuting program and how workers qualify can minimize exposure to discrimination claims.
- Depending on the circumstances, working from home might be a reasonable accommodation for an employee’s disability for purposes of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

---

**Physical Work-Site**

Setting up and arranging a workspace in a personal residence can introduce a variety of unexpected and unrecognized hazards. Principal among those is potential exposure to soft tissue injuries and musculoskeletal disorders because of improperly adjusted workstations, working from easy chairs or couches, and working in awkward, non-neutral postures. The resources outlined in this document can help provide guidance and information to ensure a safer work-from-home arrangement.

Although the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has ruled the Occupational Safety and Health Act does not apply to an employee’s home, worker’s compensation laws (which vary by state) generally extend to cover workers in these environments, as long as they are performing work in the course and scope of employment.

### OSHA (for home office worksite)
- The Act does not apply to an employee’s house or furnishings
- OSHA will not hold employers liable for work activities in employees’ home offices
- OSHA does not expect employers to inspect home offices
- OSHA does not, and will not, inspect home offices
- OSHA requires employers continue to be responsible for maintaining records of work-related injuries and illnesses

### Workers’ Compensation
- Varies by state, but generally extends to any location where employees’ an employee is working
- Covers injuries arising out of or in the course of employment
- Employer should assist workers in identifying and minimizing workplace hazards and exposures
The physical work-site presents potential hazards to employee injury. Despite the worksite being the home of the employee, the employer should establish guidelines for ensuring a safe workspace. Best practices include:

- Assisting home-based workers in ensuring home offices are set up ergonomically correct.
- Require employees to complete an initial and periodic home-based office inspection.

A properly adjusted workstation is one **adjusted and set up to promote neutral body postures for a specific individual user**. For a seated person, a properly adjusted workstation will be one resulting in the following neutral body postures:

- Feet – flat on the floor or on foot rest
- Upper Legs/Thighs – roughly parallel to the floor
- Knees – roughly 90° angle and about an inch of space between the back of the knee and the front edge of the seat pan
- Hips – roughly 90° angle with the lower back pressed comfortably against the chair back rest or lumbar support
- Wrists – hand in the same plane as the forearm (neither flexed or extended)
- Elbows – roughly 90° angle
- Upper Arms – hanging straight down from the shoulder
- Head – ears roughly in line with shoulders, tilted neither forward or backward
Workstation Adjustment

Workstations should be set up and adjusted to heights and positions resulting in the neutral body postures noted above. One size does not fit all; rather one size fits one person.

Office furniture and equipment varies significantly with respect to adjustability. Generally speaking, the desk or work surface height is fixed or the least adjustable, so making adjustments to the chair, keyboard/keyboard tray, and monitor are usually the quickest fixes. If neutral postures cannot be achieved with the existing work surface height, the work surface will need to be relocated.

The following are some general guidelines for adjusting chairs, keyboards/keyboard trays, and monitors:

**Chair**

- Adjust seat pan height so feet are flat on the floor and thighs are parallel to the floor.
- Adjust the seat pan depth (if possible) so roughly 1” of space is present behind the knees.
- Adjust the lumbar support so it supports the lower back. You may feel like the support is pushing your stomach out toward the keyboard.
- Arm rests, if provided, should be adjusted to elbow height when the arms are hanging relaxed from the shoulder.
- Seat pan should be flat or tilted slightly forward.
- Backrest should be straight upright or tilted slightly back.
- Seat pan should provide adequate cushioning so that weight is evenly distributed over the entire pan surface.
- Seat pan width should allow comfort for the user.

**Keyboard/Keyboard Tray/Mouse**

- Keyboard height should be adjusted so the home row of the keyboard (asdfjkl;) is at roughly elbow height.
- Wrists should remain in neutral (tilted neither up nor down) during use.
- Keyboard can be tilted slightly downward so long as neutral wrist posture is maintained.
- Mouse or input device should be placed directly adjacent to the keyboard and at the same height as the keyboard.
- Keyboard should be placed directly in front of the operator at a distance allowing the upper arms to hang straight down from the shoulders. Avoid reaching out, away from the body to use the keyboard.
Monitor

- Adjust height so top of monitor is at or slightly below eye level.
- For bi-focal wearers, monitor height should be lowered slightly to prevent having to tilt the head back to view the screen.
- Monitor should be placed directly in front of user, centered on the user, and at least an arm’s length away from the user.
- Adjust monitor contrast high and brightness low. Make adjustments throughout the day based on changing external lighting conditions.
- Prevent glare by positioning monitors at a 90° angle to exterior windows, and changing the angle or tilt of the monitor to reduce glare from overhead lighting.
- Utilize an anti-glare screen if necessary.
- For dual monitor workstations, position the monitor most frequently used directly in front of the user. If both are used equally, or close to equally, position them equally on each side of the user’s centerline.

Other Considerations

- Feet should always be firmly supported. A foot rest is typically only needed when the chair height must be raised to a point where the feet are not in solid contact with the floor.
- Consider a copy holder when working from hard copy. Place it as close to the same distance and height as possible to the monitor.
- Vary your work routine to allow for periodically standing up from the work station and walking around.
- Take short breaks to stretch muscles in the forearms, shoulders, back, neck, and legs.
- For frequent phone use, move the phone close to the operator and use a hand-free head set or speaker phone to eliminate cradling the received between the shoulder and ear.

You can also use OSHA’s Computer Workstation eTool for information on setting up work stations properly.

The Home Office Checklist at the end of this document can be used by telecommuting employees to ensure a safe physical work site at home.
Other Work Site Issues

The Coronavirus Pandemic has radically altered the way we live, work, learn and play. The impact of these changes almost immediately became evident socially and economically, and the ripple effects will continue to manifest in ways known and unknown. In an effort to mitigate the spread of the virus through social distancing and compliance with shelter-in-place requests or requirements, work-from-home arrangements have become the norm. In addition to the physical challenges, there are social and emotional challenges. The following information is intended to help workers navigate these new challenges safely and efficiently.

Cyber Threats

The Department of Homeland Security’s Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) has issued an alert warning of potential system vulnerabilities as more and more workers move to home-based office settings. The agency recommends the following mitigation measures:

- Maintain the latest security updates and patches on Virtual Private Networks (VPNs)
- Alert employees to an expected increase in phishing attempts. See CISA Avoiding Social Engineering and Phishing Attacks
- Implement multi-factor authentication on all VPN connections
- Ensure IT security personnel are prepared to ramp up remote cybersecurity tasks such as log reviews, attack detection and incident response and recovery
- Report incidents, phishing, malware and other cybersecurity concerns to CISA

Comfort, Productivity and Social Considerations

Beyond the physical differences of working from a temporary space in an extra bedroom, on the kitchen table, or on a couch, etc., working from home creates other less recognized challenges. Humans crave social interaction and the isolation of working from home creates a barrier to these opportunities. Interruption in daily work routines can lead to feelings of anxiety and frustration. Working from home can produce feelings of separation or loneliness. The following are tips and considerations for maintaining mental health and a productive state of mind:

- Increase the frequency of “live” contact through the use of online web conferencing and chat platforms such as GoToMeeting, Zoom, WebEx, Skype, Slack, FaceTime
- Consider non-work video chat sessions to catch up with co-workers and share day to day experiences, frustrations, hopes, fears, etc.
- Grab a snack and beverage and set up a virtual social hour or a morning coffee meeting to maintain connection with co-workers
- Understand and accept distractions and background noises are an unavoidable part of video conferencing when working from home, but be self-aware and cognizant to minimize same
- Strike a balance between email, chat and text. Exclusive use of these tools can lead to feelings of isolation.
- Pick up the phone. Daily interaction will eliminate feeling lonely
- Understand work from home expectations from your manager and your team
- Loneliness and feelings of isolation are normal. If they begin to feel overwhelming, contact your Human Resources professionals or utilize your company’s Employee Assistance Program
Work Routine and Time Management

Establish a work routine including identifying “work time” and “non-work time” to the extent possible. Similar to how your daily commute allows you to decompress from a day at the office, set aside time at home to un-plug from work at the end of each workday. Consider these additional “routines”:

- Maintain your usual weekday sleep schedule including getting up and going to be at the same time
- Begin and end your workday at the same time as you normally would
- Create a to-do list for the day including time estimates for the tasks and use it to plan your day
- End your workday by starting a to-do list for the next day
- Put your physical work (files, documents, computer, notes, etc.) away when you are done working for the day
- Once work is done for the day, rest your mind and body with an activity such as exercise, stretching, meditation, listening to music or a podcast, taking a walk, connecting with friends via phone or video chat
- Strive to get a minimum of 8 hours of sleep every night

Nutrition

- Maintain your eating and snacking schedule similar to the office
- Keep unhealthy treats out of sight and easy reach
- Avoid eating your lunch at your temporary work area
- Drink more water to suppress feelings of hunger and avoid excessive snacking
- Eating healthy meals and snacks will help avoid feelings of fatigue and lack of energy

Breaks

Improve focus on work by taking frequent (hourly) short breaks. These breaks will allow you to:

- Rest and recover from physically repetitive tasks
- Address unavoidable distractions from home-based work
- Stretch and move body parts involved in sustained static postures
- Go outside to get some fresh air and movement
Home Based Office Safety Checklist

This checklist outlines areas and items to evaluate prior to telecommuting beginning to ensure the home-based workspace is safe, ergonomically suitable, and free from recognized hazards. The employee should evaluate each item on the list, then read and sign/date the checklist confirming completion of the checklist and understanding of the teleworking agreement as outlined on this form.

Name of Telecommuter: ____________________________

Home Phone: ____________________________ Mobile Phone: ____________________________

Worksite Street Address: ____________________________

City: ____________________________ State: ____________________________ Zip: ____________________________

Briefly define and describe the designated work area:

GENERAL

☐ Floors are clear and free of hazards
☐ Carpets well-secured to the floor and free of frayed or worn seams
☐ Rugs equipped with foam backing or used with anti-slip matting
☐ Office space neat, clean and free of excessive amounts of combustibles
☐ Work area is reasonably quiet and free of distractions
☐ File drawers are not top-heavy
☐ Cabinets, shelves or furniture greater than 5’ high secured to prevent toppling during an earthquake
☐ Books and supplies stored to prevent falling during an earthquake
☐ Wheels on rolling files or other mobile equipment free from binding when rolled and can be locked to prevent rolling
☐ Cords, cables and other items arranged to prevent a tripping hazard
☐ Phone lines and electrical cords are secured under a desk or along a wall, and away from heat sources
☐ Work area is well ventilated and heated/cooled to provide worker comfort
Office space is equipped with a plug-in or hardwired carbon monoxide detector with battery backup, installed per manufacturer’s instructions

If the office is located below grade (e.g. basement), has the home been tested for radon? (see www.epa.gov/radon for more information about radon hazards and how to correct)

**FIRE SAFETY**

- Walkways, aisles, and doorways are unobstructed
- Working smoke detector covering the designated work space. Is battery replaced annually?
- Charged, accessible, dry chemical fire extinguisher in area
- More than one exit from work area
- Work space is kept free of trash, clutter and flammable liquids
- Combustible materials located at least 3’ from radiators, portable heaters, or other heat sources

**ELECTRICAL SAFETY**

- Computer equipment is connected to a surge protector
- Electrical system is adequate for office equipment
- All electrical plugs, cords, outlets and panels in good condition and free of exposed conductors or broken insulation
- Electrical enclosures (switches, outlets, receptacles and junction boxes) have tight-fitting covers or plates
- Extension cords and power strips not daisy chained and no permanent extension cords in use
- Electrical cords run in non-traffic areas, not run under rugs, and are not nailed or stapled in place
- Equipment turned off when not in use
- Electrical outlets are grounded with three-pronged plugs
**WORKSTATION ERGONOMICS**

- Chair is sturdy and in good condition. No loose wheels/casters or broken hardware/components
- When keying, forearms close to parallel with the floor. Wrists/hands in neutral position, i.e., in same plane as forearm
- Monitor is roughly arm’s length from eyes, with top of viewable portion of screen slightly below eye level
- Adjustable chair and understanding of how to correctly adjust it
- Feet reach the floor when seated, or are fully supported by a footrest
- Back adequately supported by the backrest
- Monitor screen free from noticeable glare throughout the work day
- Work area is adequately illuminated with lighting directed toward the side or behind the line of vision, not in front or above it
- Clear understanding of neutral posture and how to properly adjust workstation. (see Physical Workstation section of this document)

**OTHER SAFETY/SECURITY MEASURES**

- All stairs with four or more steps equipped with handrails
- Emergency phone numbers (hospital, fire department and police department) posted and easily accessible
- First aid kit easily accessible and replenished as needed
- Files and data are secure
- Inventory of all equipment in the office including serial numbers when possible
- Access to company computer network via secured path (VPN or secured log in)

The employee will designate a workspace as a “home office” and will maintain this workspace in a safe condition, free from hazards and other dangers to people and equipment. I have reviewed and understand the items outlined in this checklist.

_____________________________  ________________________
Home-Based Worker’s Signature     Date