

COVID-19 CORONAVIRUS RISK BULLETIN

WORKING FROM HOME SAFELY

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As more companies are temporarily closing their doors to allow for social-distancing measures, employees are faced with new experiences and opportunities working from home. These insights from AGCS risk engineers can help those employees settle in comfortably and safely.

All of the recommendations are technical advisory in nature from a risk management perspective and may not apply to your specific operations. Please review recommendations carefully and determine how they can best apply to your specific needs prior to implementation. Any queries relating to insurance coverage should be made with your local contact in underwriting, agent and/or broker.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, many employees have been asked to work from home. But the reality of identifying and even sharing a workspace to work from can be challenging. Here are recommended steps you can take to help you work from home safely:

WORK ENVIRONMENT

It is important that you pick an area of your home where you can focus and have enough space to work. Perhaps a room that has a door or a corner limiting distractions. If a quiet area is difficult to find, consider using noise cancelling headphones to help eliminate distractions.

Make sure your work area is clear from tripping hazards such as extension cords. Set your workstation up with the most commonly used items within easy reach.

As much as possible, set up your work area to meet your needs for work surface height, position and lighting. Ideally your work environment should be adjusted to meet your needs instead of you adjusting yourself to meet the work environment.

WORK SURFACE

You should always work from a hard surface such as a table or a counter that is clear. Avoid the temptation to work from a couch or a bed as it provides little support to your body for typical office tasks. Ideally, your work surface will be at a height that is 28" to 30", which is a good sitting height for most people between 5'8" and 5'10" tall who use a conventional task chair. If you are taller or shorter, be prepared to change your work surface height.

CHAIRS

An adjustable chair is ideal, however, if you do not have one, pick a chair that provides support to your legs and back. Check to see if your elbows (when held at the sides of your body) are at the same height as the home row of keys on the keyboard or are at a 90 degree angle. If not, you'll need to raise or lower the chair height so that the elbows and your hands are at about the same height. This will place your forearms at a near-horizontal level. More importantly, this helps to keep your hands and wrists in a "neutral posture." If your chair does not adjust, consider using a cushion to raise your height.

Your feet should be on the floor with the knees equal to or slightly lower than your hip joint. If you cannot lower your chair to achieve this, you will need something that is the right height for this to rest your feet on. If you do not have a foot rest, you can use a box, a binder or a book to get your feet up.

If you need additional back support, consider placing a small rolled towel or pillow in the small of your back to provide additional support.

MONITOR

Position the monitor screen so it's vertical or at a slight tilt to prevent glare and yet give you a clear view of the screen. The top of the monitor should be set at eye level or slightly lower, and should be positioned for viewing with your head comfortably erect and balanced. This eliminates stress on your neck and shoulders.

If you wear bifocal glasses, check to see if your lower bifocal correction is for monitor viewing distance. You may need to lower the monitor a little more if this is the case.

If you are working from a laptop only and have an external keyboard/mouse, use your laptop screen as a monitor by putting it on a box or reams of paper until you reach the correct eye level.

KEYBOARD

External keyboards and mouse devices can allow for a more natural arm position. Raise the rear of the keyboard to provide a slight tilt. The keyboard should be on a solid surface and at a height that the home row of the keys are approximately the same height as your elbows.

If using a laptop keyboard, ensure the keyboard is at the correct height but position the screen at an acceptable angle to allow proper viewing without glare.

LIGHTING

Lighting is also important to consider when setting up a workstation. Soft or natural lighting is best. Lighting that is too bright or too dim may cause eye strain. If working near a window, have your screen set up perpendicular to the window in order to minimize glare.

If using artificial light, indirect general room lighting may be best with track lighting focused down on your work surface. This can provide a softer lighting condition and sufficient illumination for your notes/work area.

STRETCH BREAKS – 60/60

Take brief 60 second breaks every 60 minutes. The following stretches can help. Also give your eyes a rest by looking away from your screen periodically. Additionally, stand up and move around periodically. If possible, perform some functions while standing (calls, etc.).



Stretch shoulders and arms by interlacing fingers behind your back, palms facing your body, and slowly turn elbows inward while straightening your arms.



Lateral Neck Stretching - Tilt your head first to the right, hold for 10 seconds. Then tilt your head to left, hold for 10 seconds. You should avoid lifting your shoulder to your head.



Put your palms together in front of your chest. Slowly lower your hands until you feel a mild stretch in your forearms.



Stretch arms and upper back. Straighten arms in front of you without interlacing fingers and with palms facing toward body.



Chin Glide - Without lifting your chin up or down, glide your head straight back. Repeat slowly 5 times.

Source: Parker Pen USA

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- Drink extra water to stay hydrated. In addition to regular hydration, the extra water can help with dry eyes.
- Establish ground rules by developing a work schedule. Maintain a start time, lunch break, end time and stick to it as best you can.
- Use technology to stay connected to colleagues through messaging, email and web or videoconferencing.
- De-stress: Consider using fitness or mindfulness apps to help you stay focused and keep your mind and body healthy.

REFERENCES –

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<https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/computerworkstations/index.html>

Workstation set up e-tool:

https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/computerworkstations/components_monitors.html

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