

CORONAVIRUS GUIDANCE for BRIDAL RETAILERS



In England non-essential retailers are allowed to reopen to the public, once they meet new Covid-19 safety and security guidelines, from Monday 15th June - but there is no obligation for them to do so. Further clarification of Phase Two is expected soon. In Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland the lockdown continues until further notice for non-essential retailers.

It is the responsibility of each business owner to carry out a Covid-19 Risk Assessment and to decide the most appropriate methods to implement social distancing and other coronavirus control measures according to their business and its premises. It is a good idea to involve your staff in the drawing up of a set of rules and guidelines for you and them to implement.

PREMISES

Implement a thorough cleaning routine with disinfectant products at the start of each day paying close attention to high-contact objects like door handles and plates, handrails, light switches, taps, kettles, keyboard and mouse, and card terminals.

Though diluted bleach can be used, it is best to buy disinfectant sprays and wipes that state they have anti-virus properties, and scented products are a bonus. But read the instructions carefully, wear disposable gloves and ventilate the treated areas. Between every appointment again use the spray or wipes on all high-contact objects and surfaces. Install hand sanitiser dispensers at the front door, in fitting rooms, toilets, kitchen and office.

These can be free standing or wall mounted but touchless, automatic ones are best. All of these items and non-medical PPE are available online from Morplan and many other wholesalers.

Keep the front door locked at all times to control entry and exit but only if you have fitted a lock like a thumb-turn latchbolt which is easily opened from the inside in an emergency. Keep internal doors open if they are not fire doors to reduce contact.

Your premises need to have good ventilation to maintain ideal levels of oxygen and humidity. Where possible, open windows. If you have air conditioning use it on a low setting to avoid excessive recirculation of air, but do not use electric fans. To improve the quality of the air in your shop use an air purifier or an air filtration unit. Also, ask your air conditioning service company if it is possible to upgrade with HEPA or HVAC filters.

*Carry out
a Risk
Assessment*

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Check your customers can move between the front door, appointment area and toilet without compromising the 2m rule with your staff. If your premises are large enough to accommodate more than one appointment at a time under social distancing, plan out the different areas to meet the 2m rule. In both cases, it may be necessary to move furniture or fittings to act as barriers.

Remove all brochures and magazines – if you wish to show product images use a tablet that can be more easily cleaned after the appointment.

Place a notice on your door or window announcing that you have implemented coronavirus control measures and that you are operating by appointment only.

STAFF

First and foremost, staff - and customers - must take individual responsibility and self-isolate if they have any symptoms or have been in the same room or vicinity of anyone who is self-isolating or who has tested positive. They must not put their colleagues at risk.

Consider opening the shop for longer hours or more days so staff can work shifts to reduce numbers working together. If working the same hours, staff should arrive and leave five minutes apart. Using public transport to get to work would be a factor in deciding which staff to bring out of furlough. If public transport cannot be avoided, then face masks should be mandatory.

Hand washing is of paramount importance and should be done at the beginning and end of the working day, and between every appointment. Hand drying should be with paper towels or electrical driers. Place hand washing reminders above all sinks and basins and don't forget moisturisers as we are all washing our hands far more than they are used to.

*Hand washing
is No. 1*

Of lower risk but still important, ask staff to keep a bag at the shop to put their own coat or jacket in when they arrive along with their shoes which should be changed for a pair to wear in the shop only.

PPE is a tricky issue but the Government has been clear that the wearing of PPE for most retail workers is not beneficial - <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/shops-and-branches>. For bridal retail, your Risk Assessment will highlight when it will be of use.

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Some members of staff will naturally be anxious in the current situation, and for those returning from a lengthy period of furlough it may take a while for them to readjust to being back at work. So, it is very important that the shop owner or manager sits down with each member of staff to talk this through and to find a way forward to manage their concerns.

There are three main areas of concern to anticipate. Firstly, the office and kitchen as they are shared work areas. The simplest solution is to close off the kitchen area and ask staff to bring their own food and drink and crockery and cutlery each day.

If the consensus is to keep the kettle, microwave and sink available, then it is strictly one person at a time, and the equipment cleaned after every usage. Remove all fabric drying towels from the premises and replace with disposable paper towels. Disposable gloves can be worn but must be disposed of immediately after use – far more effective is 20 seconds of hand washing on entering and leaving the kitchen area.

Provide staff with their own pen, calculator, tape measure and any other item that is usually shared. Consider having a stock of non-touch tools which are now available on Amazon and eBay. Be aware that like many things 'covid' for sale on the internet, they come from China and can take a week or more to arrive – to buy British try <https://thekeepsafe.co.uk/products/the-keepsafe>.

The second area is appointments. Whilst the customer is seated, social distancing will remove the need for any PPE but for trying on and for fittings it is advisable for the consultant to wear a face covering or mask whenever she is within 2m of the bride.

Lastly, couriers are already only delivering to the doorstep so packages will have to be carried into the store. To be absolutely safe, provide your staff with disposable gloves to carry boxes, and masks if it takes two to carry. Hands must be washed after every delivery.

Share this information from WHO with your staff so they put on masks effectively:

https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-Coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/when-and-how-to-use-masks?gclid=CjwKCAjwwYP2BRBGEiwAkoBpAnSYcxSAIj9EVCHW_dEfx-CFonJaqtndz_bHjxIoLWzNjJwIZ6rLEBoC7B8QAvD_BwE.

Discuss with your staff if they wish to provide their own mask or if you will provide them. It is important with customer facing staff that you approve any face covering or mask used. It should also be stressed that face coverings are not a replacement for other control measures. Hand and surface hygiene remain the best ways of managing risk in the workplace, and masks must be changed or washed daily.

*Masks
protect
others*

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Non-touch forehead temperature checks are being considered by some retailers for both staff and customers, but there are points to consider. Firstly, this is a medical examination and requires the individual's permission, which can be with-held. Secondly, you have to decide the trigger point – 37.5, 38.0 or 38.5 - and be aware that some people with Covid-19 do not have a fever, and some people with a fever do not have Covid-19. Thirdly, the person using the thermometer needs to be wearing a face covering and gloves.

Finally, start every day with a check list meeting and update staff with any new procedures or recommendations. Don't forget that it is the owner's responsibility to remind staff and customers of the 2m rule if it is not being adhered to.

APPOINTMENTS

Keep in regular contact with all of your customers to gain their trust and to reassure them. Offer an initial virtual appointment if they are hesitant about visiting your store.

When an appointment is made, whether by 'phone or email, explain the virus control measures you have adopted so the bride knows exactly what to expect when she arrives.

The One Guest Rule

Limit brides to one adult guest. You may be put under pressure to accept more than one, but you should remain firm on this very important rule. Under no circumstances allow babies or children in – set your own age limit, it could be 14, 15 or 16.

If the guest is from the same household they can sit next to each other. If from separate households then the appointment area must be large enough to accommodate three 2m spaced seats for them and the consultant. If this cannot be achieved in your shop then the bride can only have one guest from the same household.

Encourage brides to invite other guests remotely by WhatsApp or FaceTime on her smartphone which can be held by the guest or put on a stand you provide.

On arrival, the bride and her guest should be asked to confirm the following statements, or they could be put on a tablet or printed card for them to read:

'I am not exhibiting any Covid-19 symptoms, ie. fever, dry cough or tiredness.'

'I have not been in with anyone who has symptoms or has the virus in the last 7 days.'

At this point, explain your control measures again so the guest is fully aware of them.

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If you decide you want to issue a Covid-19 disclaimer – whether verbal or written – now is the time to do it. Be aware that disclaimers rarely stand up in court but, on the other hand, proving where the virus was transmitted will not be easy. The disclaimer should list the prevention measures you have taken and ask the customer to confirm that they are entering the premises at their own risk and that they have been requested to wash their hands, and offered a face covering.

Customer's coats and jackets should be kept as close to the front door as possible, and it is advisable to request they remove their shoes. As with staff, consider providing a coat and shoes bag for each person.

Invite all customers to hand sanitise at the door or hand wash in the toilet - this is not optional as the bride will be touching the sample gowns.

To reduce contact with your stock, escort the bride and her guest to the appointment seating to discourage them from browsing the dress rails. Instead, the consultant, following initial discussions with the bride, selects dresses from the rail to present to the bride. She will decide which to try on and this is the pattern for the rest of the appointment.

*Discourage
browsing!*

If a bride is insistent on browsing your rails, you should provide her with gloves and possibly a face covering. For trying on dresses she will need gloves, and these can be disposable latex or reusable cotton or silk, but at the end of the appointment they must be either disposed of or set aside for washing. Again, gloves must never be a substitute for washing hands. It is a good idea to offer the bride a face covering if this puts her at ease.

The consultant must explain to the bride how to step into and put on each dress. When the bride is ready, ask her to turn her back to the curtain so the consultant – wearing a face covering - can comfortably enter the fitting room to fasten the buttons or zip and then withdraw. If the guest is from the same household she can assist the bride with the dress under the consultant's instruction. Avoid if you can dresses that have to be put on over the head.

It is recommended not to offer customers food or drink. If you decide to offer a hot or cold drink, your staff must be happy with this, preparation should be with gloves and the drink must be in a disposable cup or glass.

Consider extending the length of appointments because, with the hygiene measures to be undertaken afterwards, appointments should not be allowed to over-run. Appointments should be managed sympathetically but professionally so that they end on time.

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If a customer becomes unhappy or distressed by your anti-virus protection measures, you must step in to calm them but firmly end the appointment.

If a customer or any member of staff becomes unwell, immediately isolate as best you can on the premises and arrange transport home. Any member of staff assisting the unwell person must wear a mask and gloves but it is not necessary for that member of staff to go home though they must carry out thorough cleaning of all contact points and hand washing.

Please read these guidance notes for cleaning after a person suspected of having Covid-19 has left the building: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings>.

Have a supply of pens for customers to sign their orders and then to take away with them. For payments, cards should be preferred to cash or cheques. Notes, if accepted, should be handled and counted with gloves on.

AFTER THE APPOINTMENT

Allow a minimum of 30 minutes between appointments for hygiene measures on multi-person touch points and surfaces to be carried out thoroughly, focussing on the appointment area and fitting room, and for staff hand washing.

Ideally, use a steamer on the outside of all tried on sample gowns or an iron if the fabric is not suitable for steaming. Do not under any circumstances use a disinfectant on your sample gowns. If a dress has to be put on over the head, consider removing it from the rail after one appointment per day. Inevitably, some samples will be required for successive appointments so 60 minutes may be a more practical break between appointments.

At the end of the day, steam all tried on dresses on the inside in preparation for the following day. A further recommendation, because of the high temperature involved, is to put all tried on dresses through a tumble drier at the end of the week. Do not, on any account, carry out any procedure that is contrary to the instructions on the garment's care label.

Further guidance for retailers can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/shops-and-branches>. As more is known about the virus and more guidance is issued, it is advisable to review and adjust your guidelines and rules on a weekly basis.

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