How to protect your employees' mental health while remote working

As the UK continues in lockdown amid the COVID-19 pandemic, employees are facing the reality of working from home for weeks on end. For some employers who are new to operating this way of working, we are sharing some of the findings from our latest whitepaper – **The effects of remote working on stress, wellbeing and productivity**.

According to our whitepaper, mental health issues could develop more frequently amongst remote workers, as they may find themselves separated from communication channels and support mechanisms.

Nuffield Health's research also shows spending more than 2.5 days a week working away from the office is associated with deterioration in co-worker relationships and job satisfaction.
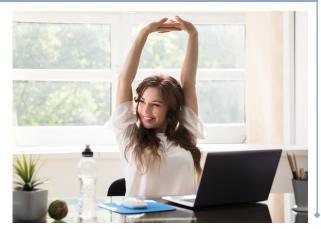
However, there are plenty of things employers can do to support their staff's wellbeing and ensure business productivity while remote working.

Tackle coronavirus head-on

Make sure, company health protocols are clear and accessible while incidents like the current coronavirus epidemic continues. This means keeping staff informed on the steps you're taking as a company and what to do if they're feeling unwell.

Share the latest updates and **health guidelines** on the virus to keep employees in the loop, however, be careful about how often you're sharing information. Key daily updates are fine, but employees shouldn't be overwhelmed with distressing news updates, multiple times a day.

Get personal

- Many employees are going to experience symptoms of distress and anxiety over the news of the pandemic. In addition to this, home working can negatively impact resilience, the process of negotiating, managing and adapting to significant sources of stress or trauma

- It's important to provide employees with coping mechanisms and to create a range of **personalised interventions** to meet the needs of your remote workforce and effectively reduce stress and burnout

- Staff who express signs of distress should be guided towards further emotional support. It may be that anxiety around coronavirus is a noticeable sign of pre-existing or wider emotional struggles

- In these cases, highlight existing workplace offerings like employee assistance programmes (EAPs) which offer direct, confidential contact with counsellors and mental health experts

- Consider inviting an expert to give a virtual company talk on general coping mechanisms for anxiety. This may help those who are worried about speaking to managers or employers about their fears.

Set boundaries

- When it comes to remote working, it can be easier for employees to work longer hours and take less breaks to get more work done

- To prevent this, make sure you keep work communication within employees' official hours and encourage them to work within this timeframe too

- Trust between the manager and the employee is vital for remote working to succeed for both sides. There must be regular communication with the manager and wider team, with agreements on set, clear times employees will be contactable and ways they can contact their line manager, so they don't feel isolated

- Set hours should be reviewed regularly in this time of uncertainty and shared calendars can help employees feel more structured and know when to 'clock off'

- Remember, your employees are probably worried about a whole host of other issues relating to coronavirus, so taking any worry or fear out of remote working will make their lives considerably easier.

Communicate carefully

- Communication needs to be tailored to the correct demographic too. More senior workers may need fewer management catchups, with perhaps weekly phone calls being enough

- Younger employees, with less experience, may need more regular communication to feel supported

- Build out your engagement strategy by assessing how different demographics want to be communicated with. The most obvious answer for many modern employees is mobile. People are on their phones most of the time, so getting company updates on their devices ensures they're receiving your communication on the right platform

- However, you'll need multiple 'touchpoints' when sharing company news and updates and for older remote workers, this might include more traditional communication like formal, company emails.