

Explanations on the risk groups defined by the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) and the individual safety measures at work

The RKI information and support constitutes a **risk evaluation** on the basis of experience with the disease progression over the past months. The RKI outlines all the groups of **individuals who according to present knowledge have an increased risk of a severe disease progression**.

The risk for a severe progression is higher for certain groups of individuals (risk groups); This includes:

- Individuals from 50 to 60 years old; the risk increases steadily with age
- Smokers (weak evidence)
- Very obese individuals

And **individuals with certain pre-existing or underlying diseases**:

- diseases of the heart (for example coronary heart disease),
- chronic lung diseases (for example COPD),
- chronic liver diseases,
- diabetes mellitus,
- cancer and
- with a weakened immune system (for example due to a disease that is accompanied by immune deficiency or through the regular taking of medicines that affect or weaken the immune system, such as cortisone).

Individuals with several underlying diseases (multimorbidity) have a greater risk than those with just one underlying disease according to present knowledge

The various potential combinations of the above factors exemplify the complexity of a risk evaluation. Therefore, a general determination of belonging to a risk group is not possible. Rather, an individual evaluation of risk factors as in a medical evaluation is required.

Those who belong to a risk group should take the rules of behavioural prevention for protection from infection particularly seriously. In addition to the hygiene measures, this includes caution with regard to social contacts.

This does not mean that all individuals over 50 or 60 years of age are automatically prohibited from working on site. There is no general work prohibition for people who belong to the risk groups. In accordance with the requirements of the Federal Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs: if the **employer** is aware that an individual belongs to a risk group, **the employer shall take the necessary individual protective measures**.

Recommendation for protective measures against SARS-CoV-2 for individuals in companies according to the Hessian Ministry for Social Affairs and Integration (HMSI)

In general:

- Hand hygiene (washing hands with soap for at least 20 seconds),
- Maintaining distance (at least 2 metres),
- Cough and sneeze etiquette (Cough and sneeze into crook of arm).
- Work organisation: Maintaining distancing rules (at least 1.5 metres) by spacing out workspaces, through using commonly used facilities in different time shifts, or also by having different times for starting and stopping work.

- Organisation of breaks. The break rooms must be selected so that they are large enough to allow sufficient distance (at least 1.5 m) between employees.
- Manage breaks in “shifts operation“: Organisational measures for individual employees to use the break rooms and break areas at different times.

In addition to the measures stated above, the following aspects also play a role for employees with an increased risk:

Employees with increased risk who have only inner-company contact to people

- Working alone, e.g., in an individual office that can be entered without contact to other people,
- Transferring to an individual workspace without contact to other people,
- Switching to remote work or working from home

Employees with an increased risk with additional contact to the public / customers

- No contact with the public or customers
- All risk groups must be equally protected from an infection as far as possible.
- The employee is to review whether activities without contact to customers or the public are possible.
- If these measures are not possible, a temporary leave of absence for the employee in question is unavoidable.

Goethe University Regulations:

Employees with previous or underlying diseases with an increased risk for a severe disease progression may not work in areas with public traffic (service areas / customer service). If work activities cannot be carried out under strict observance of the RKI provisions (distancing rules), they should work at home or remotely in consultation with their supervisor. If neither of these is possible, they should be put on paid leave.

The focus of these measures is the health safety of employees in accordance with the employer’s duty of care.

Sources (*German*):

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