

25 March 2020

Advice on the use of whistles during the COVID-19 pandemic

RSSB advises that the use of whistles on platforms and stations (for example, as part of the train dispatch process), should cease for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic to remove an infection risk to employees where safer alternatives can be used.

The use of a whistle by railway employees is encouraging a physical action that is contrary to [Public Health England \(PHE\)](#) on not touching the face with unwashed hands. The action of holding the whistle in the hand, bringing that hand to the mouth and blowing the whistle could lead to the direct introduction of viable coronavirus into the employee's mouth and airways. The normalisation of the hand to mouth action also undermines the key message of avoiding touching the eyes, nose or mouth that the employee would be expected to maintain at all times.

[Coronaviruses can remain viable](#) for prolonged periods on a range of environmental surfaces and inanimate objects such as whistles depending upon the material, temperature and humidity. Whistles sitting on a lanyard outside the employees clothing can be contaminated with viral particles from airborne particles or direct transfer from the employees clothing or from a breach of social distancing limits from an infected person. Thus a whistle could remain a possible infection risk to the employee for several days after contamination should the whistle have no, or ineffective cleaning and disinfection.

Mitigating measures for the continued use of whistles may be considered where introducing an alternative to the continued use of the whistle is not practicable or deemed to be acceptably safe. Implementing such mitigations will rely upon complete adherence by employees to the three precautionary measures listed below, as well as physical distancing between employees and passengers to be maintained (minimum of two metres). The precautionary measures would require all of the following to be achieved:

- The employee's hands to be effectively cleaned immediately prior to each use of the whistle following [PHE guidance](#), following all other advice provided by PHE for the transport sector
- The whistle to be regularly cleaned and effectively disinfected
- The whistle to be immediately placed in a protective covering between each use to avoid environmental contamination between each clean and disinfection

Note: The above mitigations would still require the employee to perform a hand to mouth operation which may still carry a residual risk for the employee and also be viewed by other staff and passengers as being incongruent with the key public health message regarding hand to mouth action.

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