



Drink spiking at work events: *practical steps employers should consider*

This checklist sets up practical considerations for employers to keep employees safe at work-related social events, particularly where members of the public will have access. It is not intended to cause unnecessary alarm among the workforce or to discourage work socials. Rather, it is designed to help employers identify risks and take reasonable steps to protect their employees.

RISK ASSESSMENTS

Employers should consider whether their existing risk assessment processes adequately addresses employee safety at work-related events, particularly events at external venues or in spaces shared with members of the public. An assessment does not need to refer expressly to spiking—it may be more appropriate to frame the issue more broadly, for example, by considering risks associated with alcohol, crowded or public venues, late-evening events, and third-party conduct, and the arrangements in place for raising concerns or obtaining assistance.

A properly considered risk assessment can help demonstrate that an employer has taken proactive, preventative steps to protect employees. It should also help the employer calibrate their response. For most corporate events, the appropriate measures are likely to be practical and unobtrusive, rather than complicated or conspicuous.

UPDATE POLICIES

Employers should review and refresh their 'dignity at work' policy so that it addresses the risks identified in the assessment and gives clear, practical guidance on expected standards of behaviour. The policy should have clear reporting routes, clarity around the process to be followed under the policy, along with escalation procedures and consequences for breaches. It should also be embedded through training, manager briefings, and regular communication, so that the policies are understood and applied in practice.

Where policies address work-related social events, they should make clear that expected standards of conduct apply outside the office and that concerns can be raised, regardless of whether the conduct involves a colleague, a client, a supplier, a guest, or another third party.

VENUE DUE DILIGENCE

Before selecting or confirming an external venue, employers may wish to engage with the venue on its general safety arrangements. This could include asking about staffing levels, security, welfare support, CCTV, how concerns are escalated, and what arrangements are in place if an attendee becomes unwell or reports feeling unsafe.

Employers may decide that it is unnecessary or disproportionate to ask direct questions about drink spiking in every case. A broader discussion about attendee safety and incident response may be more appropriate and can demonstrate that an employer has approached the preventative duty seriously.

PRE-EVENT COMMUNICATIONS

The invitation is a great way to manage attendees' expectations and set the tone for the whole event. When communicating details of an upcoming event, employers may wish to include a short, proportionate reminder about expected standards of behaviour and personal safety. This does not need to be heavy handed—a simple message encouraging employees to look out for one another can be effective, and could include best options for travelling home (for example, information about public transport close to the venue, and details of the employer's preferred taxi services, along with a recommendation for staff to download the relevant transport app before the event starts), and directing employees to the relevant support channels if they have any concerns.

If the event is being held at an external venue that is also open to members of the public, it may be helpful to mention this to encourage employees to remain aware of their surroundings. The tone should be measured and practical, avoiding language that suggests that the employer considers the event to be unsafe.

Practical reminders that could be shared with employees include encouraging them not to leave drinks unattended, to be cautious about accepting drinks from people they do not know, to stay with colleagues where possible, and to raise concerns promptly if they feel unwell, unsafe, or uncomfortable. Employers may also wish to remind employees of where to find the organisation's relevant policies and reporting channels.

PRACTICAL SAFETY MEASURES

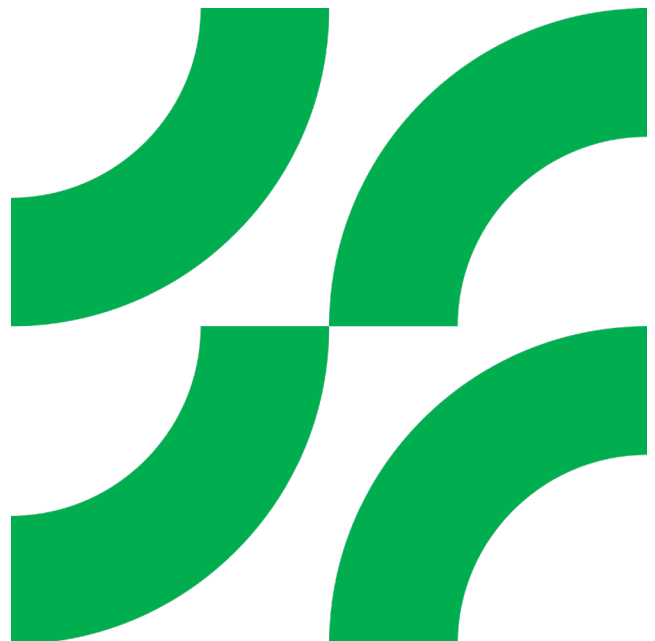
Employers may wish to consider whether any practical safety measures are appropriate for the event. For some events, this may simply mean ensuring that water and non-alcoholic options are readily available; that food is sufficiently filling and is available for the duration of the event to cover early and late arrivals; that transport arrangements have been considered; that employees know who to speak to if they have a concern; and that venue staff understand how issues should be escalated.

In some circumstances, employers may also consider making drink covers or drink-testing strips available. These products may offer reassurance and can be a relatively low-cost measure, but they should be considered in context—for many corporate events, they may not be necessary. Where they are used, they are likely to be most effective if made available discreetly and without messaging that creates unnecessary concern.

SENIOR MANAGERS PRESENT AT THE EVENT

Employers may wish to ensure that a senior manager is present at the event who has employee well-being and safety in mind. This individual should limit their alcohol consumption, be ready to deal with any issues that may arise and be prepared to stay at the event until all guests have left. This does not need to be advertised as a formal role, and should not change the tone of the event. The purpose is simply to ensure that someone with appropriate seniority is alert to any concerns, can respond if an employee appears unwell, unsafe, or uncomfortable, and can escalate matters to the venue or the organisation if necessary.

This is a straightforward but necessarily discreet step. It helps to ensure that concerns can be identified and addressed promptly, without creating a sense that the event is being monitored, or placing an unrealistic burden on one individual.



Contacts

London



Isabella Janssen
Trainee
Employment Litigation

Global presence

A&O Shearman is an international legal practice with nearly 4,000 lawyers, including some 750 partners, working in 28 countries worldwide. A current list of A&O Shearman offices is available at aoshearman.com/en/global-coverage.

A&O Shearman means Allen Overy Shearman Sterling LLP and/or its affiliated undertakings. Allen Overy Shearman Sterling LLP is a limited liability partnership registered in England and Wales with registered number OC306763. Allen Overy Shearman Sterling (Holdings) Limited is a limited company registered in England and Wales with registered number 07462870. Allen Overy Shearman Sterling LLP (SRA number 401323) and Allen Overy Shearman Sterling (Holdings) Limited (SRA number 557139) are authorised and regulated by the Solicitors Regulation Authority of England and Wales.

The term partner is used to refer to a member of Allen Overy Shearman Sterling LLP or a director of Allen Overy Shearman Sterling (Holdings) Limited or, in either case, an employee or consultant with equivalent standing and qualifications or an individual with equivalent status in one of Allen Overy Shearman Sterling LLP's affiliated undertakings. A list of the members of Allen Overy Shearman Sterling LLP and of the non-members who are designated as partners, and a list of the directors of Allen Overy Shearman Sterling (Holdings) Limited, is open to inspection at our registered office at One Bishops Square, London E1 6AD.

A&O Shearman was formed on 1 May, 2024 by the combination of Shearman & Sterling LLP and Allen & Overy LLP and their respective affiliates (the legacy firms). This content may include or reflect material generated and matters undertaken by one or more of the legacy firms rather than A&O Shearman.

© Allen Overy Shearman Sterling LLP 2026. This document is for general information purposes only and is not intended to provide legal or other professional advice.

UKSI: 2024666388.2