Unite Guide Coronavirus COVID-19 Officers & Representatives

Rob Miguel National Health and Safety Advisor.

This guide is for officers and reps and represents the current situation at time of writing, and will be updated on a regular basis.

Last updated 19 March 2020

Information about the virus

A coronavirus is a type of virus. As a group, coronaviruses are common across the world. Typical symptoms of coronavirus include fever and a cough that may progress to a severe pneumonia causing shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. Novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is a new strain of coronavirus first identified in Wuhan City, China.

Generally, coronavirus can cause more severe symptoms in people with weakened immune systems, older people, and those with long-term conditions like diabetes, cancer and chronic lung disease. The current evidence is that most cases appear to be mild. Those who have died in Wuhan appear to have had pre-existing health conditions. The UK is now one of the first countries outside China to have a prototype specific laboratory test for this new disease.

How does it spread?
The main way the virus spreads is by contamination when someone carrying the virus coughs or sneezes. Viruses can also spread through particles known as aerosols, released from the lungs. These can travel further and can remain in the air or on surfaces for several hours.

The NHS website has more information about how coronavirus is spread and answers common questions about the virus.

Risk level

As of 11 March, the World Health Organisation has defined the COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic. The UK Chief Medical Officers are continuing to assess the situation in the UK on a regular basis, at present it is set at high risk. Government daily updates: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-information-for-the-public

What is a 'pandemic'?
A pandemic is an outbreak that affects hundreds of millions of people worldwide, leading to a large proportion of them becoming ill. Pandemics occur when a virus with very different features emerges. Because it is new, people have little or no immunity. Normally there are around two or three such pandemics every century. The most recent was in 2009 with the H1N1 virus, commonly referred to as ‘swine flu’.
Health and Safety Requirements

There is a primary duty under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (HASAWA) together with associated legislation for employers to protect the health safety and welfare of their workforce and others affected by their operations. The duty applies in common law to take reasonable care for the health and safety of the workforce.

Specific legislation applying to infectious micro-organisms/biological agents, of which COVID-19 is a group, is the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (COSHH)

Risk Assessments for COV-19 under COSHH

The Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens ACDP has an approved list of biological agents. The Approved List provides the approved classification of biological agents as referred to in COSHH. COVID-19 is a new virus, however previous coronaviruses such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV), a previously unlisted virus, have now been listed and classified. The Approved List of biological agents - HSE

COSHH Assessment in Practice
https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/infection.pdf

- Assess the risks to health: We know that this varies. Current findings from researchers at China’s Centre for Disease Control and Prevention on more than 72,000 COVID-19 cases shows a fatality rate of 2.3%. However, most cases were mild, but the disease hits the elderly and vulnerable the hardest, such as those with cardiovascular disease, diabetes, respiratory conditions based on clinical findings.

- Assess who are most at risk of exposure: Depends on the type of work being performed and exposure risk, including potential for interaction with infectious people and contamination of the work environment. Different jobs will carry a higher risk of being exposed to the virus such as front line staff in health, at airports, education, prisons and frequent travellers. The government has issued advice for different front line sectors can be found here for both non-clinical settings and for health professionals: https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-guidance#guidance-for-non-clinical-settings

In most circumstances the amount of infectious virus on any contaminated surfaces is likely to have decreased significantly by 24 hours.

- Prevent or adequately control exposure and decide what precautions are needed: There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19. The best way to prevent infection is to reduce the risk of being exposed to the virus.
Measures for protecting workers from exposure depend on the risk of exposure. For example, health care workers exposed to confirmed cases will need PPE such as face masks designed for protection against virus, full face visor, gloves and so on. **Employers should adapt infection control strategies based on results of the risk assessment.** Therefore depending on the risks identified as above appropriate combinations of engineering and administrative controls, safe work practices, and personal protective equipment (PPE) should be deployed to prevent worker exposures. **It is very important that workers receive appropriate training on all aspects of control measures identified from the assessment.**

For all workers, regardless of specific exposure risks, the recommendations remain:

- Frequently wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or use an alcohol-based hand rub with at least 60% alcohol. [Hand washing guidance](#)
- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.**
- Try to avoid close contact with people who are unwell
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when you cough or sneeze. See [Catch it, Bin it, Kill it](#)
- **Put used tissues in the bin straight away**

**Action for Officers and Reps:** Ensure employers are providing facilities for washing, soap and hand sanitisers when needed. Also appropriate training, instructions and signage.

**Identify and Isolate Suspected Cases**

- In all workplaces where exposure to the COVID-19 may occur, prompt identification and isolation of potentially infectious individuals is a critical first step in protecting workers, visitors, and others at the worksite.
- Immediately isolate people suspected of having COVID-19. For example, move potentially infectious people to isolation rooms and close the doors. On an aircraft, move potentially infectious people to seats away from passengers and crew, if possible and without compromising aviation safety. In other worksites, move potentially infectious people to a location away from workers, customers, and other visitors.
- Take steps to limit spread of the person’s infectious respiratory secretions including by providing them a facemask and asking them to wear it, if they can tolerate that.
- **Note:** A surgical mask on a patient or other sick person should not be confused with PPE for a worker. The mask acts to contain potentially infectious respiratory secretions at the source (i.e., the person’s nose and mouth).
• If possible, isolate people suspected of having COVID-19 separately from those with confirmed cases of the virus to prevent further transmission, including in screening, triage, or healthcare facilities.

• Restrict the number of personnel entering isolation areas, including the room of a patient with suspected/confirmed COVID-19.

• Protect workers in close contact* with the sick person by using additional engineering and administrative control, safe work practices and PPE.

*Close contact is defined as being about six (6) feet (approximately two (2) metres) from an infected person, or within the room or care area of an infected patient or first line responders for a prolonged period. Close contact also includes instances where there is direct contact with infectious secretions. Close contact generally does not include brief interactions.

• Ensure that control measures are used and maintained properly and that safety procedures are followed.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Where a risk assessment has identified using PPE, use and dispose of all PPE according to the instructions and training provided by your employer or organisation. An outline of appropriate PPE is as follows:

• Disposable gloves and fluid repellent
• Surgical face mask or where identified by the assessment respirators, for example: Half masks (reusable) with P3 filter or FFP3 (disposable) or full face mask P3 filter
• Eye protection such as face visor or goggles
• Disposable plastic apron and should be worn
• Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water before putting on and after taking off PPE.


Respiratory Protection HSE: https://www.hse.gov.uk/respiratory-protective-equipment/

Union representatives need to be consulted on every part of the process, including when guidance is being put together. This is a legal requirement in regards union Health and Safety Representatives under the Safety Representatives Safety Committees Regulations 77.

ACTION FOR REPS AND OFFICERS: Ask for a current up to date risk assessment and all procedures for protection of workers. In the changing climate we are in, with the virus spreading, this should be reviewed regularly. Ensure consultation is taking place including production of guidance and around risk assessments Challenge if this is not taking place.
Should people wear face masks to protect themselves from infection?

Face masks play a very important role in clinical settings, such as hospitals but there’s very little evidence of widespread benefit from their use outside of these clinical settings. **(Not to be confused as part of Identified PPE as above)** Facemasks must be worn correctly, changed frequently, removed properly and disposed of safely in order to be effective.

Where selected as part of protective measures, the standard of face masks / Respiratory Protective equipment (RPE) must have appropriate filter and be face fitted. The HSE guidance on RPE recommends that for biological hazards, to use the highest efficiency filter possible to control exposure down to the highest level. That can be achieved by using either **FFP3 disposable mask** (min) or a **full/half mask with P3 filter**. CE certification is required.

HSE guide RPE selection and face fitting: [https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/hsg53.htm](https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/hsg53.htm)

FFP3 is a minimum standard. The best way to protect ourselves from infections, including the COVID-19 virus is to follow hygiene protocols described elsewhere in this guide. For example wash our hands frequently with soap and water or use a sanitiser gel, as well as always carrying tissues and using them to catch coughs and sneezes, then putting the tissue in a bin.

**When and how to use masks - World Health Organization**

**TRAVEL**

**Returning to the UK from affected areas**

As of the 13 March 2020 guidance around returning from specified countries and areas, and information on the actions that these individuals should follow on returning to the UK and if they develop symptoms has been withdrawn. As this is fast moving please see further updates in the link here: [https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response](https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response)

**Travel to affected areas**

Employers should be undertaking risk assessments in order to establish whether international travel is necessary in a given situation. Also organisations should manage and offer appropriate support to any employees stranded abroad, whether that is through cancelled flights, restriction’s in that country, or medical reasons.

Travel Restrictions
Exceptional travel advisory notice

The Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) advises British people against all non-essential travel worldwide. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to unprecedented international border closures and other restrictions. All countries may restrict travel without notice.

The FCO was already advising against all but essential travel or all travel to some areas or countries due to risks that do not relate to COVID-19. This advice remains in place. Check FCO travel advice pages for the latest information.

For more information: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-advice-novel-coronavirus

People with confirmed or possible Coronavirus (COVID – 19) Infection
Circumstances for Self-Isolation/Staying at home.

Following the Prime Minister’s recent statement, the Government has issued new guidance: COVID-19: guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection


This guidance is intended for:

- People with symptoms that may be caused by coronavirus, and do not require hospital treatment, who must remain at home until they are well
- Those living in households with someone who shows symptoms that may be caused by coronavirus

The main messages are:

- If you live alone and you have symptoms of coronavirus illness (COVID-19), however mild, stay at home for 7 days from when your symptoms started. (See ending isolation section for more information)
- If you live with others and you or one of them have symptoms of coronavirus, then all household members must stay at home and not leave the house for 14 days. The 14-day period starts from the day when the first person in the house became ill
- It is likely that people living within a household will infect each other or be infected already. Staying at home for 14 days will greatly reduce the overall amount of infection the household could pass on to others in the community
- For anyone in the household who starts displaying symptoms, they need to stay at home for 7 days from when the symptoms appeared, regardless of what day they are on in the original 14-day isolation period. (See ending isolation section for more information)
• If you can, move any vulnerable individuals (such as the elderly and those with underlying health conditions) out of your home, to stay with friends or family for the duration of the home isolation period
• if you cannot move vulnerable people out of your home, stay away from them as much as possible
• if you have coronavirus symptoms:
  • Do **not** go to a GP surgery, pharmacy or hospital
  • You do not need to contact 111 to tell them you’re staying at home
  • Testing for coronavirus is not needed if you’re staying at home
• Plan ahead and ask others for help to ensure that you can successfully stay at home and consider what can be done for vulnerable people in the household
• Ask your employer, friends and family to help you to get the things you need to stay at home
• Wash your hands regularly for 20 seconds, each time using soap and water, or use hand sanitiser
• If you feel you cannot cope with your symptoms at home, or your condition gets worse, or your symptoms do not get better after 7 days, then use the **NHS 111 online** coronavirus service. If you do not have internet access, call NHS 111. For a medical emergency dial 999

**England and Wales** call 111  
**Scotland:** call your GP or NHS 24 on 111 out of hours  
**Northern Ireland** call 0300 200 7885  
**Republic of Ireland:** GP, phone 112 or 999

**Do not go to a GP surgery, pharmacy or hospital.**

**The most common symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19)** are recent onset of:

• new continuous cough and/or
• high temperature

For most people, coronavirus (COVID-19) will be a mild infection.

**Home Working**

Employers have the same health and safety responsibilities for home workers as for any other workers.

When someone is working from home temporarily, consider:

• How will you keep in touch with them?
• What work activity will they be doing?
• Can it be done safely?
• Control measures need to be put in place to protect them
Lone working without supervision

There will always be greater risks for lone workers with no direct supervision or anyone to help them if things go wrong.

Keep in touch with lone workers, including those working from home, and ensure regular contact to make sure they are healthy and safe.

If contact is poor, workers may feel disconnected, isolated or abandoned. This can affect stress levels and mental health.

Working with display screen equipment

There is no increased risk from display screen equipment (DSE) for those working at home temporarily. So employers do not need to do home workstation assessments.

You could provide workers with advice on completing their own basic assessment at home. A practical workstation checklist will help but employers do not have to provide this for those working temporarily at home. See portable checklist: https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/ck1.pdf

Other simple steps you can take to reduce the risks from display screen work:

- breaking up long spells of DSE work with rest breaks (at least 5 minutes every hour) or changes in activity
- avoiding awkward, static postures by regularly changing position
- getting up and moving or doing stretching exercises
- avoiding eye fatigue by changing focus or blinking from time to time

Specialised DSE equipment needs

Employers should try to meet those needs where possible.

For some equipment (eg keyboards, mouse, riser) this could mean allowing workers to take this equipment home.

For other larger items (eg ergonomic chairs, height-adjustable desks) encourage workers to try other ways of creating a comfortable working environment (eg supporting cushions).

Stress and mental health

Home working can cause work-related stress and affect people’s mental health. Being away from managers and colleagues could make it difficult to get proper support.

Keep in touch

Put procedures in place so you can keep in direct contact with home workers so you can as early as possible. It is also important to have an emergency point of contact and to share this so people know how to get help if they need it.
Social distancing and protecting older and vulnerable people

Background and scope of guidance

The guidance advises on social distancing measures we should all be taking to reduce social interaction between people in order to reduce the transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19). Those who are at increased risk of severe illness from coronavirus (COVID-19) to be particularly stringent in following social distancing measures.

The group includes:

- aged 70 or older (regardless of medical conditions)
- under 70 with an underlying health conditions some examples are:
  - chronic (long-term) respiratory diseases
  - chronic heart disease
  - chronic kidney disease
  - chronic liver disease
  - chronic neurological conditions
  - diabetes
  - problems with your spleen for e.g. sickle cell
  - weakened immune system as the result of conditions such as HIV and AIDS, or medicines such as steroid tablets or chemotherapy
- those who are pregnant

Note: there are some clinical conditions which put people at even higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19. If you are in this category, next week the NHS in England will directly contact you with advice the more stringent measures you should take in order to keep yourself and others safe. For now, you should rigorously follow the social distancing advice in full, outlined below.

People falling into this group are those who may be at particular risk due to complex health problems such as:

- People who have received an organ transplant and remain on ongoing immunosuppression medication
- People with cancer who are undergoing active chemotherapy or radiotherapy
- People with cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukaemia who are at any stage of treatment
- People with severe chest conditions such as cystic fibrosis or severe asthma (requiring hospital admissions or courses of steroid tablets)
- People with severe diseases of body systems, such as severe kidney disease (dialysis)
Social Distancing

Social distancing measures are steps you can take to reduce the social interaction between people. This will help reduce the transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19).

They are:

1. Avoid contact with someone who is displaying symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19). These symptoms include high temperature and/or new and continuous cough
2. Avoid non-essential use of public transport, varying your travel times to avoid rush hour, when possible
3. Work from home, where possible. Your employer should support you to do this. Please refer to employer guidance for more information
4. Avoid large gatherings, and gatherings in smaller public spaces such as pubs, cinemas, restaurants, theatres, bars, clubs
5. Avoid gatherings with friends and family. Keep in touch using remote technology such as phone, internet, and social media
6. Use telephone or online services to contact your GP or other essential services

Everyone should be trying to follow these measures as much as is pragmatic.

We strongly advise you to follow the above measures as much as you can and to significantly limit your face-to-face interaction with friends and family if possible, particularly if you:

- are over 70
- have an underlying health condition
- are pregnant

This advice is likely to be in place for some weeks.

See Government guide for full information:

**ACTION FOR REPS AND OFFICERS** It is advised to negotiate firm policies on self-isolation that include clear instructions employees should refrain from work in line with GOV/PHE advice. Ensure there are management procedures in place to protect vulnerable people in line with government guidance and the Equality Act 2010
Measures Announced by Government 16 March 2020

- Ensure that those who contact with a member of their household who had symptoms of the virus should stay home for 14 days.
- Non-essential contact with others would be curtailed.
- People to start working from home as soon as possible
- Social venues such as clubs, restaurant and pubs should no longer be visited. This was especially important for those who were pregnant, older and vulnerable.
- By this weekend 20 March 2020. Those who had were most vulnerable should be “shielded” for up to 12 weeks.
- Londoners should avoid non-essential social gatherings and called for those who could to work from home.
- Sporting events mass gatherings would no longer receive the support of emergency services.

See following links for latest update

PM Statement 16 March

UK Government Response Contains various pieces of government guidance from travel to requirements vulnerable people:


Specialised industry guidance

The government has published new and updated guidance 16 March 2020 to provide affected sectors with the latest advice on managing the threat from COVID-19. The Public Health England (PHE) guidance provides important information for specific sectors, including schools and transport, on what precautions to take, what to do if someone develops symptoms and how to limit the spread of the virus.

The guidance will assist staff, employers and members of the public after the government last week shifted into the ‘delay’ phase of its action plan to slow the spread of the virus, reduce pressures on the NHS and protect the most vulnerable.

Guidance for health professionals

Comprehensive Government guidance introduced for health professionals was updated on 18 March 2020. Includes guidance on the assessment and management of suspected UK cases. The latest update includes the current information on investigation and initial clinical management of possible cases of COVID-19. Please access the full guide here:


The advice includes preparing for an assessment of a possible case of COVID-19, and entails precautionary procedures to be used including appropriate PPE.

Guidance in Non Clinical Settings

Updated on 18 March 2020 and includes various sector guidance, such as shipping and ports, transport, prisons, education and other non-clinical situations such as cleaning and mass gatherings.


Guidance for Workplaces

- Businesses and workplaces should encourage their employees to work at home, wherever possible
- If someone becomes unwell in the workplace with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature, they should be sent home and advised to follow the advice to stay at home
- Employees should be reminded to wash their hands for 20 seconds more frequently and catch coughs and sneezes in tissues
- Frequently clean and disinfect objects and surfaces that are touched regularly, using your standard cleaning products
- Employees will need your support to adhere to the recommendation to stay at home to reduce the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) to others
- Those who follow advice to stay at home will be eligible for statutory sick pay (SSP) from the first day of their absence from work
- Employers should use their discretion concerning the need for medical evidence for certification for employees who are unwell. This will allow GPs to focus on their patients
- Employees from defined vulnerable groups should be strongly advised and supported to stay at home and work from there if possible.

See full guidance for Employers and businesses here:
Business Support Budget 11 March 2020

The recent Budget included key features are to provide support for public services, individuals and businesses to ensure the impact of COVID-19 is minimised. [https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/support-for-those-affected-by-covid-19](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/support-for-those-affected-by-covid-19)

- A new Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme, delivered by the British Business Bank, will enable businesses with a turnover of no more than £41 million to apply for a loan of up to £1.2 million, with the government covering up to 80% of any losses with no fees.
- For businesses with fewer than 250 employees, the cost of providing 14 days of statutory sick pay per employee will be refunded by the government in full.
- Businesses and self-employed individuals in financial distress and with outstanding tax liabilities receive support with their tax affairs.
- There will be a £3,000 cash grant to 700,000 of our smallest businesses, delivered by Local Authorities, and worth a total of £2 billion.
- Temporarily increasing the business rates retail discount in England to 100% for 2020-21 for properties below £51,000 rateable value. Nearly half of all business properties will not pay a penny of business rates.

Sick Pay

This is an important matter that will be worrying many of our members particularly around self-isolation. It is a vital negotiating issue for Officers and Reps.

Employees and Self-Employed People Statutory Sick pay and benefits

To make sure people in work can take the necessary time off to stay at home if they are suffering from coronavirus or to prevent its spread, changes have been made to Statutory Sick Pay. Universal Credit has also been changed to support self-employed claimants.

The changes include:

- People who cannot work due to coronavirus and are eligible for Statutory Sick Pay will get it from day one, rather than from the fourth day of their illness. Government intend to legislate so this measure applies retrospectively from 13 March 2020
- Statutory Sick Pay will be payable to people who are staying at home on government advice, not just those who are infected, from 13 March 2020 after regulations were laid on 12 March 2020 – employers are urged to use their discretion about what evidence, if any, they ask for
- If employees need to provide evidence to their employer that they need to stay at home due to coronavirus, they will be able to get it from the NHS 111 Online instead of having to get a fit note from their doctor – this is currently under development and will be made available soon
Self-employed claimants on Universal Credit who are required to stay at home or are ill as a result of coronavirus will not have a Minimum Income Floor (an assumed level of income) applied for a period of time while affected.


Statutory Sick Pay will be made available from day one when self-isolating, instead of day four. The details were published on the 4th March by the Department of Works and Pensions and the Prime Minister. Sick pay from day one for those affected by coronavirus - Gov.uk

This move will form part of emergency legislation measures from the Government. The change is certain to be a temporary measure in response to the outbreak and will lapse when it is no longer required. However a good time to push for this to become a permanent feature.

Groups that are not entitled to Statutory Sick Pay
There will be workers who will not be entitled to Statutory Sick Pay, usually those most vulnerable, on zero hours contracts and self-employed. The options open to those groups are not satisfactory, and that has always been the case a situation trade unions are fighting to change. The range of support currently in place for those who do not receive Statutory Sick Pay, includes Universal Credit and contributory Employment and Support Allowance. https://www.gov.uk/government/news/face-to-face-health-assessments-for-benefits-suspended-amid-coronavirus-outbreak

Contractual / Sick Pay if someone has to go into self- isolation

When addressing the House of Commons on 26.02.20, the secretary of state for health Matt Hancock MP said “Self-isolation on medical advice is considered sickness for employment purposes.”

Public Health England is advising people to self-isolate in the circumstances set out in the section previous in this guide “Close Contact with an Infected Person and Returning Travellers Circumstances for to Self – Isolation”, however this constitutes guidance.

Considering the statement from government and the advice from PHE guidance on self-isolations seems quite straight forward. However, circumstances differ depending on whether the individual has symptoms and or is asymptomatic.

Self- Isolation with Symptoms
In the case of an employee who self-isolates because they have developed the symptoms of COVID-19, then they will be entitled to whatever sick pay is payable under their contract of employment (although this will not always result in the maintenance of normal pay during the full period of absence).
Self-Isolation without symptoms
It is by no means clear that an asymptomatic employee who self-isolates will have a contractual entitlement to receive sick pay. This will depend on how the employee’s contract of employment defines the right to sick pay.

Under many contracts of employment, an employee has no contractual right to sick pay unless they are incapable of work. Statutory Sick Pay is also payable only in respect of a period of ‘incapacity for work’.

Acas has produced guidance on this matter https://www.acas.org.uk/coronavirus

This states:

“There’s no legal (‘statutory’) right to pay if someone is not sick but cannot work because ... they have been told by a medical expert to self-isolate”.

However, employers have a duty to protect the health safety and welfare of all employees and others affected by their business and a common law duty of care. It would then follow employers would be wise to treat self-isolation as sick leave because there will otherwise be a risk that employees will come to work in order to get paid, in which case they could spread the virus if they have it. ACAS recommends this as “good practice” in their guide.

An employer instructs the person to remain home
It is suggested that where an employer instructs an employee who would otherwise be capable of work to self-isolate for a specified period, the employee will be entitled to receive their normal pay for the duration of the self-isolation, because their absence from work then becomes a form of suspension.

The government could address this problem by introducing a statutory right to normal pay during any period of self-isolation recommended by PHE. However, robust policies need to be adopted by employers to firm up this situation, in order to protect the workers and public health.

**ACTION FOR REPS AND OFFICERS**

National and Local Agreements are key to secure adequate pay for our members during this pandemic. Negotiating COVID 19 associated elements into sick pay provision is essential. In general, negotiate firm policies and clear instructions from employers that sick pay will be paid in full when self-isolating in line with PHE recommendation.

Employee needs time off work to look after someone

Employees are entitled to time off work to help someone who depends on them (a 'dependant') in an unexpected event or emergency. This would apply to situations to do with coronavirus.
For example, if they have children they need to look after or arrange childcare for because their school has closed, help their child or another dependant if they’re sick, or need to go into isolation or hospital.

There’s no statutory right to pay for this time off, but some employers might offer pay depending on the contract or workplace policy. The amount of time off an employee takes to look after someone must be reasonable for the situation.

**Time off because your child’s school is closed and the child has to self-isolate**

Some schools have closed and the situation may get worse. Employees are able to take time off to help their dependents under the Employment Rights Act. This includes unexpected disruption to arrangements for care, where the dependent is ill, and an incident at school. However, there is no statutory right to pay in such circumstances.

**Employees that do not want to go to work because they are worried about COVID-19**

Some people might feel they do not want to go to work if they're afraid of catching coronavirus. An employer should listen to any concerns staff may have. If there are genuine concerns, the employer must try to resolve them to protect the health and safety of their staff. For example, if possible, the employer could offer flexible working. If an employee still does not want to go in, they may be able to arrange with their employer to take the time off as holiday or unpaid leave. The employer does not have to agree to this.

**Equality Act 2010**

**Disability**

If an employee has a disability within the meaning of the Act and that disability results in a higher risk of developing severe COVID-19, such as those with a compromised immune system, reasonable adjustments will need to be implemented. This could be accommodated for example by working from home, paid leave and so on.

**Discrimination**

Since the outbreak reached the UK there have been reports of targeting people of south Asian origin, particularly from China and surrounding areas. Within a workplace environment, employers are liable for harassment and discrimination by their employees to fellow workers. They will need to take reasonable steps to prevent the workforce being exposed to such abuse and discrimination, and have equalities policies in place, appropriate training and ensure such behaviour is prevented.
ACTION FOR REPS and OFFICERS

Ensure equalities policies are in place. Consider negotiating paid leave for those who have dependents and need to take time off. Ensure employers are issuing current information and have regular briefings with staff.

Mental Health Considerations during COVID-19 Outbreak

The following principals were developed by the Mental Health Department at WHO as support for mental and psychological well-being during COVID-19 outbreak.

General population

1. COVID-19 has and is likely to affect people from many countries, in many geographical locations. Don’t attach it to any ethnicity or nationality. Be empathetic to those who got affected, in and from any country, those with the disease have not done anything wrong.

2. Don’t - refer to people with the disease as “COVID-19 cases”, “victims” “COVID-19 families” or the “diseased”. They are “people who have COVID-19”, “people who are being treated for COVID-19”, “people who are recovering from COVID-19” and after recovering from COVID-19 their life will go on with their jobs, families and loved ones.

3. Avoid watching, reading or listening to news that cause you to feel anxious or distressed; seek information mainly to take practical steps to prepare your plans and protect yourself and loved ones. Seek information updates at specific times during the day once or twice. The sudden and near-constant stream of news reports about an outbreak can cause anyone to feel worried. Get the facts. Gather information at regular intervals, from WHO website and local health authorities’ platforms, in order to help you distinguish facts from rumours.

4. Protect yourself and be supportive to others. Assisting others in their time of need can benefit the person receiving support as well as the helper.

WHO document https://protect-eu.mimecast.com/s/Mp9PCwK05sRgNZfVFe-3?domain=who.int

Further Information

Guidance for schools, colleges and local authorities on maintaining educational provision

Unite is asking as a matter of urgency for greater clarity, as the guidance as it stands is confusing in a lot of area’s.

The guidance states that parents are being asked to keep their children at home, wherever possible, and asked schools to remain open only for those children who absolutely need to attend.
It is important to underline that schools, colleges and other educational establishments remain safe places for children. But the fewer children making the journey to school, and the fewer children in educational settings, the lower the risk that the virus can spread and infect vulnerable individuals in wider society.

Schools are, therefore, being asked to continue to provide care for a limited number of children - children who are vulnerable and children whose parents are critical to the Covid-19 response and cannot be safely cared for at home. Vulnerable children include children who are supported by social care, those with safeguarding and welfare needs, including child in need plans, on child protection plans, ‘looked after’ children, young carers, disabled children and those with education, health and care (EHC) plans.

The guidance asks the following principles to be followed:

- If it is at all possible for children to be at home, then they should be.
- If a child needs specialist support, is vulnerable or has a parent who is a critical worker, then educational provision will be available for them.
- Parents should not rely for childcare upon those who are advised to be in the stringent social distancing category such as grandparents, friends, or family members with underlying conditions.
- Parents should also do everything they can to ensure children are not mixing socially in a way which can continue to spread the virus. They should observe the same social distancing principles as adults.
- Residential special schools, boarding schools and special settings continue to care for children wherever possible.

Parents whose work is critical to the COVID-19 response include those who work in health and social care and in other key sectors outlined below:

- **Health and social care** - This includes but is not limited to doctors, nurses, midwives, paramedics, social workers, care workers, and other frontline health and social care staff including volunteers; the support and specialist staff required to maintain the UK’s health and social care sector; those working as part of the health and social care supply chain, including producers and distributors of medicines and medical and personal protective equipment.
- **Education and childcare** - This includes nursery and teaching staff, social workers and those specialist education professionals who must remain active during the COVID-19 response to deliver this approach.
• **Key public services** - This includes those essential to the running of the justice system, religious staff, charities and workers delivering key frontline services, those responsible for the management of the deceased, and journalists and broadcasters who are providing public service broadcasting.

• **Local and national government** - This only includes those administrative occupations essential to the effective delivery of the COVID-19 response or delivering essential public services such as the payment of benefits, including in government agencies and arms length bodies.

• **Food and other necessary goods** - This includes those involved in food production, processing, distribution, sale and delivery as well as those essential to the provision of other key goods (for example hygienic and veterinary medicines).

• **Public safety and national security** - This includes police and support staff, Ministry of Defence civilians, contractor and armed forces personnel (those critical to the delivery of key defence and national security outputs and essential to the response to the COVID-19 pandemic), fire and rescue service employees (including support staff), National Crime Agency staff, those maintaining border security, prison and probation staff and other national security roles, including those overseas.

• **Transport** - This includes those who will keep the air, water, road and rail passenger and freight transport modes operating during the COVID-19 response, including those working on transport systems through which supply chains pass.

• **Utilities, communication and financial services** - This includes staff needed for essential financial services provision (including but not limited to workers in banks, building societies and financial market infrastructure), the oil, gas, electricity and water sectors (including sewerage), information technology and data infrastructure sector and primary industry supplies to continue during the COVID-19 response, as well as key staff working in the civil nuclear, chemicals, telecommunications (including but not limited to network operations, field engineering, call centre staff, IT and data infrastructure, 999 and 111 critical services), postal services and delivery, payments providers and waste disposal sectors.

Many parents working in these sectors may be able to ensure their child is kept at home. And every child who can be safely cared for at home should be.

If workers think they fall within the critical categories above they should confirm with their employer that, based on their business continuity arrangements, their specific role is necessary for the continuation of this essential public service.

If your school is closed then please [contact your local authority](#), who will seek to redirect you to a local school in your area that your child, or children, can attend.
What to do if someone develops symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) on site

If anyone becomes unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature in the business or workplace they should be sent home and advised to follow the stay at home guidance.

If they need clinical advice, they should go online to NHS 111 or call 111 if they don’t have internet access. In an emergency, call 999 if they are seriously ill or injured or their life is at risk. Do not visit the GP, pharmacy, urgent care centre or a hospital.

If a member of staff has helped someone who was taken unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature, they do not need to go home unless they develop symptoms themselves. They should wash their hands thoroughly for 20 seconds after any contact with someone who is unwell with symptoms consistent with coronavirus infection.

It is not necessary to close the business or workplace or send any staff home, unless government policy changes. Keep monitoring the government response page for the latest details.

Travel arrangements

Anyone who has a new, continuous cough or a high temperature should be advised to quickly and directly return home and to remain there and initiate household isolation. If they have to use public transport, they should try to keep away from other people and catch coughs and sneezes in a tissue.

Limiting spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) in business and workplaces

Businesses and employers can help reduce the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) by reminding everyone of the public health advice. Posters, leaflets and other materials are available.

Employees and customers should be reminded to wash their hands for 20 seconds more frequently than normal.

Frequently clean and disinfect objects and surfaces that are touched regularly, using your standard cleaning products.

Cleaning and waste

See the guidance on cleaning and waste
Handling post or packages

Staff should continue to follow existing risk assessments and safe systems of working; there are no additional precautions needed for handling post or packages.

**ACTION FOR OFFICERS and REPS**

The guidance in the further information section is based on recommendations from health authorities including the PHE. It is important that employers have in place written procedures for dealing with all the contingencies covered. That includes responsible persons for liaising with the health protection team. Trained personnel in place who may have to act as first line responders and are provided with the relevant protection including PPE.

Officers and reps are advised to liaise with employers to ensure they have these processes in place. **Employers have a legal duty to consult with our health and safety representatives on all of these matters.** The Government links below contain information which is updated on a regular basis