

# Unite Health and Safety Guide Coronavirus COVID-19

## Officers and 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.

### INFORMATION ABOUT THE VIRUS

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses common across the world that can cause illness such as respiratory tract infections. Typical symptoms of coronavirus include fever and a cough that may progress to a severe pneumonia causing shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. Other examples are Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS).

A novel coronavirus is a new strain that has not been previously identified in humans. The strain which is responsible for the development of COVID-19 originated in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China and is 'zoonotic' in origin, e.g. from animals and is known as SARS-CoV-2.

The virus is proving extremely dangerous to people with weakened immune systems, older people, and those with long-term conditions like diabetes, cancer and chronic lung disease. So far the current evidence is that most cases appear to be mild, however this virus is a very problematic pathogen. This is due in part to how easily it is apparently spread from human to human, currently it is thought one person may infect up to three others.

### HOW DOES IT SPREAD

The main way the virus spreads is by contamination when someone carrying the virus coughs. The Virus can also spread through an infected person touching their mouth and then objects around them these can remain on surfaces for many hours.

The NHS website has more information about how coronavirus is spread, symptoms and advice for those most vulnerable **here** <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

### 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.

The Department of Health & Social Care (DHSC) and Public Health England (PHE) are leading the UK government response to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

You can get up-to-date information about [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) and what you need to do](#) on [GOV.UK](#). Regular updated daily health advice regarding COVID-19 is provided by the four devolved health authorities set out below.

**England: Public Health England (PHE) find here**

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public>

**Scotland: NHS Scotland find here**

<https://www.hps.scot.nhs.uk/a-to-z-of-topics/wuhan-novel-coronavirus/>

**Northern Ireland: Public Health Agency find here**

<https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/news/covid-19-coronavirus>

**Wales: Public Health Wales Iechyd Cyhoeddus Cymru find here**

<https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/latest-information-on-novel-coronavirus-covid-19/>

The health authority for the Republic of Ireland and COVID info can be found **here**:

**Republic of Ireland: Health Service Executive(HSE)Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte find here:** <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/coronavirus.html>

## 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'.

COVID 19 has spread rapidly too many countries around the globe and now requires national and international co-ordinated infection controls. There is a google map which is regularly updated of confirmed cases of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) find **Here**: <https://google.org/crisisresponse/covid19-map>

## 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.

There are general duties to carry out risk assessments in order to control the risks' around COVID 19. Specific legislation applying to infectious micro-organisms/biological agents, of which corona virus is a group, comes under the auspices of the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (COSHH).

The latest advice from HSE on specific elements around COVID-19 can be found **here**: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/news/coronavirus.htm>

## **BIOLOGICAL AGENTS SUCH AS CORONAVIRUS**

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, find **here**: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/misc208.pdf>

## **RISK ASSESSMENT INFECTIOUS AGENTS**

Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens has produced a guidance on Identifying Infection at work and controlling the risks workplace, the guidance can be found **here** <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/infection.pdf>

## **TRANSMISSION and SURVIVAL CHARECTERISTICS of COVID 19 VIRUS**

The transmission of COVID-19 is thought to occur mainly through respiratory droplets generated by coughing and sneezing, and through contact with contaminated surfaces. COVID-19 virus have been found in stools and conjunctival secretions of confirmed cases.

Human coronaviruses can survive on inanimate objects and can remain viable for up to 5 days at temperatures of 22 to 25°C. Survival on environmental surfaces is dependent on the surface type. Examples up to: Plastic 72 hours \* Stainless steel 48 hours \* Copper 8 hours

Full Official government advice on the above find **here**: <https://www.gov.uk/government>

## **ASSESS THE RISKS TO HEALTH**

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. The research can be found **here**: <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2762130>

## 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 various sectors including those in the front line:

## 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, the guide can be found **here**: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/wuhan-novel-coronavirus>

The advice in the guide 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. **Find Here**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-guidance#guidance-for-non-clinical-settings>

**COVID 19 CRITICAL WORKERS** find here: [Critical worker list](#)

## PREVENT OR ADEQUATELY CONTROL EXPOSURE

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.** In practice this requires appropriate combinations of engineering and administrative controls, safe work practices, and personal protective equipment (PPE) to prevent worker exposures. **It is very important that workers receive appropriate training on all aspects of control measures identified from the assessment.**

Infection controls will also need to extend to government intervention, social distancing, travel restrictions and a strategy to protect vulnerable people. Current government strategies are set out further down this document

**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. See hand washing guidance **here:** [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/866065/Handwashing\\_techniques.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/866065/Handwashing_techniques.pdf)
- **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 Government materials here:** <https://campaignresources.phe.gov.uk/resources/campaigns/101/resources/5016>
- **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.

## **WORKPLACE PROCEDURAL INFECTION CONTROLS AND FACILITIES**

Will vary depending on the workplace

### **WORKPLACE ACCESS**

- Stop all non-essential visitors
- Monitor congestion to enable social distancing of 2 metres:
- Introduce staggered start and finish times to reduce congestion and contact
- Remove or disable entry systems that require skin contact e.g. fingerprint scanners
- Promote good hygiene, wash or clean hands before entering or leaving premises
- Provide the necessary facilities to do this, warm water soap or hand sanitiser
- Regularly clean common contact surfaces in reception, office, delivery areas
- Drivers should remain in their vehicles if the load will allow it and must wash or clean their hands before unloading goods and materials.

### **TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS**

- Avoid public transport only use if there is no choice
- Car sharing would only be recommended if living in the same household
- Travel alone in own transport if this is available to you
- Use a bicycle if this is feasible or walk if in walking distance
- The above may accommodate the once a day exercise, avoiding going out again
- Every effort made to provide additional parking spaces for cars and bicycles

## **ENHANCED CLEANING IN THE WORKPLACE**

- Enhanced and regular cleaning across all areas of the workplace utilising approved cleaning products includes all building touch points
- Enhanced and regular cleaning of escalators
- Taps and washing facilities
- Toilet flush and seats
- Door handles and push plates
- Hand rails on staircases and corridors
- Lift and hoist controls
- Machinery and equipment controls
- Food preparation and eating surfaces
- Telephone equipment
- Key boards, photocopiers and other office equipment
- Rubbish collection and storage points should be increased and emptied regularly throughout and at the end of each day.

## **CANTEENS CAFES AND EATING AREAS**

- Dedicated eating areas should be identified
- If required break times should be staggered to reduce congestion, 2 metre rule
- Create space and manage sitting 2 metres apart from each other whilst eating
- Hand cleaning facilities or hand sanitiser should be available at the entrance of any room where people eat and should be used by workers when entering and leaving
- Keep equipment clean between use, kettles, microwaves etc. if not practical:
- Ask workforce to bring pre-prepared meals and refillable drinking bottles from home
- Where catering is provided, it should be pre-prepared and wrapped food only
- Crockery, eating utensils, cups (unless from dispenser) etc. should not be used
- Payments should be taken by contactless card wherever possible
- Drinking water should be provided with enhanced cleaning measures of the tap mechanism introduced
- Tables should be cleaned between each use
- All rubbish should be put straight in the bin and not left for someone else to clear up
- All areas used for eating must be thoroughly cleaned at the end of each break and shift, including chairs, door handles, vending machines and payment devices

## **TOILET FACILITIES**

- Restrict the number of people using toilet facilities at any one time
- Promote washing hands before and after using the facilities
- Enhance the cleaning regimes for toilet facilities particularly door handles, locks and the toilet flush
- Provide suitable and sufficient rubbish bins for hand towels with regular removal and disposal.

## **HAND WASHING FACILITIES**

- Ensure soap and fresh water is readily available and kept topped up at all times
- Provide hand sanitiser where hand washing facilities are unavailable
- Regularly clean the hand washing facilities and check soap and sanitiser levels.
- Provide suitable and sufficient rubbish bins for hand towels with regular removal and disposal.
- Organisations will need extra supplies of soap, hand sanitiser and paper towels and these should be securely stored.

## **CHANGING FACILITIES, SHOWERS AND DRYING ROOMS**

- Introduce staggered start and finish times to reduce congestion, 2 metre rule
- Enhanced cleaning of all facilities throughout the day and at the end of each day
- Based on the size of each facility, determine how many people can use it at any one time to maintain a distance of 2 metres
- Provide suitable and sufficient rubbish bins in these areas with regular removal and disposal.

## **OTHER MEASURES**

- Ensure ventilation is fit for purpose in the workplace, allow adequate ventilation
- Regularly clean the inside of vehicle cabs and between uses by different operators.
- LGV drivers have route planning taking into account available toilet and washing facilities, this will be a unique problem to this situation as public eating places are now closed. HSE Guide **here:** [Driver welfare and hours](#)
- Visitors to sites should be curtailed unless essential and business critical such as delivery drivers, outside maintenance or repairs.
- Any meetings are performed via video link/ skype/ conference call
- All non - essential staff to work remotely
- All inductions if needed undertaken with social distancing close contact protocols rigorously observed
- Observe social distancing and close contact between work colleagues
- Workplaces that are operational need to have daily communication lines

## **PPE PROCEDURES**

- Re-usable PPE to be thoroughly cleaned after use and not shared between workers
- Single use PPE should be disposed of so that it cannot be reused
- See section on PPE below for details

## **FACILITIES FOR ISOLATING in the WORKPLACE**

- Procedures need to be in place if a worker or visitor has been identified as possibly infected. An isolation room needs to be made available
- In large workplaces such as airports several isolation rooms need to be allocated
- Front line staff need to be identified, trained and issued with the correct PPE to deal with any identified possible cases.
- There are specific guideline for health professionals and front line staff. Please refer to government guidance in this document pages 3 and 4.

## 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.
- Some companies are introducing body temperature monitoring at the workplace entrance, with further accurate tests if indicates high temperature
- 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. **Note: [see guide for health professionals \(on page 3\)](#)**
- 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.

## WHAT TO DO IF SOMEONE DEVELOPS SYMPTOMS OF CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) ON SITE

Current Government guidance

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 guide **here:** <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-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.

## **CLEANING OF NON-HEALTH CARE SETTINGS**

See government guidance **here**:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings>

This guidance can be applied to any non-healthcare setting such as:

- workplaces
- offices
- waiting rooms
- hotel rooms
- student accommodation
- boarding schools

COVID-19 is mainly passed on by person-to-person spread between people who are in close contact with one another and by droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

It can also spread through contact with a surface or object that has the virus on it. Cleaning helps minimise the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19). The guidance describes the cleaning required, the appropriate disposal of materials, the cleaning of equipment and hard surfaces, and the personal protective equipment (PPE) that should be worn.

Guidance to assist employers, businesses and their staff around COVID 19 found **here**:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/guidance-for-employers-and-businesses-on-coronavirus-covid-19>

## SOCIAL DISTANCING and PROCEDURAL MEASURES IN WORKPLACES

The government advice on social distancing and other measures has recently been updated, it is becoming apparent that social distancing in relation to the 2 metres rule for those in work is less stringent than in the community. Unite are opposed to such weak measures.

Below is an extract from recent government advice from the BEIS to illustrate this point. Full guide **here**: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19>.

### EXTRACT SOCIAL DISTANCING IN THE WORKPLACE – PRINCIPLES

- Where it is possible to remain 2 metres apart, use floor markings to mark the distance, particularly in the most crowded areas (for example, where queues form)
- Where it is not possible to remain 2 metres apart, staff should work side by side, or facing away from each other, rather than face to face if possible
- Where face-to-face contact is essential, this should be kept to 15 minutes or less wherever possible
- As much as possible, keep teams of workers together (cohorting), and keep teams as small as possible

## SECTOR SPECIFIC GUIDANCE

Below are links to latest government tailored advice for different sectors, giving examples of how social distancing and other measures might be implemented by employers in England. Also there are links within the documents to industry advice for certain sectors, which is more explicate than advice from government. Please also see Unite advice [Workplace Infection controls and facilities](#) which contains a list of good practice measures.

- [Overview](#)
- [Shops running a pick-up or delivery service](#)
- [Tradespeople and working in people's homes](#)
- [Construction](#)
- [Manufacturing and processing businesses](#)
- [Retail](#)
- [Logistics businesses](#)
- [Outdoor businesses](#)
- [Farming: Visiting farms for animal health and welfare](#)
- [Fishing or other short-term offshore work](#)
- [Cargo-shipping or other long-term offshore work](#)
- [Transport businesses](#)
- [Waste management businesses](#)

For government advice in the other home countries please see **here**: [Northern Ireland Executive](#), the [Scottish government](#) and the [Welsh government](#).

## INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL IN HEALTH CARE SETTINGS

There is new official guidance from health authorities that outlines: The infection prevention and control advice for health and social care providers involved in receiving, assessing and caring for patients who are a possible or confirmed case of COVID-19. It should be used in conjunction with local policies. **The guidance came into force on 2 April 2020.**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-infection-prevention-and-control>

## 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.

The global pandemic of Covid-19 has put an incredible demand for PPE. The UK government and devolved administrations have stated they are committed to ensure those on the frontline are provided with the critical PPE they need to do their job safely. However our members in various sectors are extremely worried about their safety and any provision of PPE that they will need as protection from infection. The government has very recently published a strategy and plan for PPE that covers both healthcare and non-healthcare settings. This document is essential for our officers and reps and is attached and link here: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/879221/Coronavirus\\_COVID-19\\_-\\_personal\\_protective\\_equipment\\_PPE\\_plan.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/879221/Coronavirus_COVID-19_-_personal_protective_equipment_PPE_plan.pdf)

### PPE in health and care settings

UK are professionals working in the health and social care sectors are most at risk, because they are responsible for providing essential treatment and care for those who are either confirmed to have Covid-19, are symptomatic or are highly vulnerable. They are often in prolonged close contact with individuals who are symptomatic or particularly vulnerable to infection.

They are also the professionals who are most likely to conduct the most high-risk procedures called aerosol generating procedures (AGPs), for which the highest level of PPE is recommended. It is therefore fundamental that health and care staff conducting these procedures are prioritised for access to and supply of PPE so that they can do their job safely.

The social care sector plays a vital role in the response to Covid-19, providing care to some of the most vulnerable in our society, as well as helping to move patients who no longer require acute care into the most appropriate settings. Equally, care workers must provide personal care for vulnerable individuals. Consequently, ensuring their access to PPE is important.

The UK government and devolved administrations have published clear guidance on appropriate PPE for health and social care workers. This has been written and reviewed by all four UK public health bodies and informed by NHS infection prevention control experts. **Here:** <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-infection-prevention-and-control/covid-19-personal-protective-equipment-ppe>

## PPE in non-health and non-care settings

Covid-19 is unprecedented. It is therefore understandable that people outside of health and social care sectors want to know more about use of PPE as they respond to this outbreak. The UK government: “We understand the important role that those outside the health and care system are playing in society's Covid-19 response. However, it is vital we continue to take an evidence-based approach to the use of this precious resource to ensure that we can always provide appropriate PPE for those who work in genuinely higher risk areas.”

Therefore the UK government and devolved administrations have published guidance for those in non-health care settings as to how these sectors should be using PPE as follows;

- **The management and care of deceased**
- **Cleaning in non- health care settings**
- **Prisons and other prescribed places of detention**
- **First responders**

Currently, these are the only sectors outside of health and social care which that they believe have a clinical need for PPE. You'll find all relevant PPE guidance in the newly created PPE guidance hub. **Here:** <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-personal-protective-equipment-ppe>

Guidance from the World Health Organisation (WHO) on the [Rational use of personal protective equipment for coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)

Personal Protective Equipment HSE COVID 19 **Here:** <https://www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/ppe.htm>

## 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** (minimum standard) or a **full/half mask with P3 filter**. **CE certification is required.** [When and how to use masks - World Health Organization](#)

HSE web page on RPE **here:** <https://www.hse.gov.uk/respiratory-protective-equipment/>

HSE RPE Guide PDF publication **here:** <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/hsg53.htm>

## WHAT CAN OFFICERS DO IF UNSAFE CONDITIONS EXIST AND PPE IS NOT PROVIDED

The employer's attention should be drawn to the existence of S.44 and S.100 of the Employment Rights Act. This prohibits individuals who have left the workplace in circumstances of danger, which they reasonably believe is imminent and cannot be averted, from being subjected to a detriment or dismissal.

Where employers are not operating safely or in accordance with government guidance including the heightened hygiene provisions, social distancing and the provision of PPE, then an individual can justify leaving the workplace, refuse to return where any danger persists or take appropriate steps to protect themselves. Any such decision would be on the basis of their own decision regarding their workplace as to whether there are "circumstances of danger" which they reasonably believe would be serious and imminent.

This does not mean returning home, but removing themselves to a place where that harm no longer exists or until such time as that danger is minimised or averted. If this situation occurs officers should revert to the Q&A materials that have been circulated and/or contact their legal officer for advice on how to proceed.

These individual rights do not apply to all categories of worker particularly those that have the status of self-employed. However the duty for employers, hirers or contractors to provide a safe working environment for all those engaged in a workplace applies consistently. Where poor safety practices are reported to the union, Unite will make the appropriate interventions with those organisations to ensure the highest standards of safety are maintained.

**ACTION FOR REPS AND OFFICERS:** Legal have supplied template letters, in conjunction with this facility: Ask for a current up to date risk assessment and all procedures for protection of workers. Use Unite information on hygiene controls, social distancing and PPE to benchmark against what employers are actually undertaking.

## INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL

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. New measures for self – isolation are now in place see below:

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.

**FCO Guidance here:** <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-advice-novel-coronavirus>

The situation in individual countries found **here** <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>  
Organisations to manage and offer appropriate support to any employees stranded abroad.

## **ADVICE FOR THE FREIGHT TRANSPORT INDUSTRY** essential activity

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has led to unprecedented international border closures and other restrictions.

International and domestic freight transport (including by air, ship, road and rail, including roll-on/roll-off transports) is classified by UK government as an essential activity in the context of its travel advice. The advice against non-essential travel is not intended to apply to international and domestic freight transport.

### **HEALTH AND SAFETY REQUIREMENTS FREIGHT TRANSPORT**

For the travel of accompanied goods vehicles between the UK and mainland Europe and Ireland the government is reminding ferry operators of the importance of enabling social distance measures during longer sea crossings in respect of sleeping accommodation, in particular. The government is reminding Eurotunnel in operating its Le Shuttle services of the importance of health and safety responsibilities and enabling social distance measures, both at the UK and French terminals, but also during crossings through the Channel Tunnel.

At the UK-end of journeys, domestic freight providers are also essential services. The government emphasises the health and safety responsibilities of all organisations connected with freight transport organisations running transport terminals, warehouses and distribution centres to provide access to drivers and crew to toilets, washing facilities and sufficient waiting space.

The government also recommends rail freight operators (both those operating services via the Channel Tunnel and also domestic intermodal services from ports) check specific information on cross-European trade and ensure adherence to health and safety responsibilities.

Full advice found **here**: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-freight-transport/covid-19-advice-for-the-freight-transport-industry>

### **WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT COVID 19**

Around staying at home, School closures, how public service are effected and more see the full guide: **here**: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>. The advice from government is to stay at home.

### **STAYING AT HOME/SOCIAL DISTANCING IN GENERAL PUBLIC**

You should only leave the house for very limited purposes:

- Shopping for basic necessities, for example food and medicine, which must be as infrequent as possible.
- One form of exercise a day, for example a run, walk, or cycle - alone or with members of your household.

- Any medical need, including to donate blood, avoid or escape risk of injury or harm, or to provide care or to help a vulnerable person.
- Travelling for work purposes, but only where you cannot work from home
- Even when doing these activities you should:
  - Minimise time spent outside of the home
  - Stay 2 metres (6ft) away from other people

Full guide on staying at home **here:** <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/full-guidance-on-staying-at-home-and-away-from-others>

## **BUSINESSES AND VENUES THAT MUST REMAIN CLOSED**

On 23 March the government stepped up measures to prevent the spread of coronavirus, in order to significantly reduce social contact. For a full list of all businesses and venues that are ordered to close find **here** <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/further-businesses-and-premises-to-close/further-businesses-and-premises-to-close-guidance>

## **PEOPLE WITH CONFIRMED OR POSSIBLE CORONAVIRUS (COVID – 19) INFECTION. CIRCUMSTANCES FOR SELF ISOLATION/STAYING AT HOME.**

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

**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 Stay at

Stay at home guidance for households **here:**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-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 (e.g. keyboards, mouse, riser) this could mean allowing workers to take this equipment home.

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

You can access guidance from the organisation MIND for better mental health **here** <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/>

NHS guide **here** <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/coronavirus>

## 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.

HSE Guidance on home working can be found

**Here:** <https://www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/workers/home.htm>

## 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.

### Vulnerable Group

- 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

## HIGHER RISK VULNERABLE GROUP

Some clinical conditions put people at even higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19. People in this category the NHS will have contacted directly with advice of more stringent measures that should be taken in order to keep and have additional guarding measures.

### This group of people have been advised to self - isolate for at least 12 weeks

- Not to visit other family homes or friends
- Have food left at the door by another family member or friend
- Stay in contact using various media contact including phones
- Any family staying need to be part of the household

The group consists of:

- 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)

## IF YOU HAVE A VULNERABLE PERSON LIVING WITH YOU

- Minimise as much as possible the time any vulnerable family members spend in shared spaces such as kitchens, bathrooms and sitting areas
- Aim to keep 2 metres (3 steps) away from vulnerable people you live
- Encourage them to sleep in a different bedroom/bed where possible.
- If they can, they should use a separate bathroom or go first
- Make sure they use separate towels.
- Clean baths, toilets, surfaces, eating/drinking utensils etc. after every use
- Use kitchen and eat separately
- Wash all cutlery after use
- Household should regularly wash their hands
- See government guide for full information

Here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people>

**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

## **SUPPORT FOR BUSINESSES**

The chancellor has set out a package of temporary, timely and targeted measures to support public services, people and businesses through this period of disruption caused by COVID-19.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-support-for-businesses>

**The measures will alleviate the pressure on workers and their families, as pending financial hardship will have a serious impact on stress levels and mental health.**

## **MENTAL HEALTH CONSIDERATIONS DURING COVID-19 OUTBREAK**

### **WHO - GUIDANCE**

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://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/mental-health-considerations.pdf?sfvrsn=6d3578af\\_2](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/mental-health-considerations.pdf?sfvrsn=6d3578af_2)

## **CORONAVIRUS AND YOUR WELL-BEING**

- You might be worried about coronavirus (COVID-19) and how it could affect your life. This may include having to stay at home and avoid other people.

- This might feel difficult or stressful. But there are lots of things you can try that could help your well-being.
- You're feeling anxious or worried about coronavirus
- you're staying at home and avoiding public places, following Government advice that we should stay at home as much as possible
- You are [self-isolating](#) because you, or someone you live with, has [symptoms of coronavirus](#).

Help with mental health issues during COVID 19 crisis and at any other time can be found on the MIND and NHS web sites, both provide comprehensive advice and specialist signposting:

MIND **here** <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/>

NHS **here** <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/coronavirus-covid-19->

## GOVERNMENT GUIDANCE SCHOOLS, COLLEGES, LOCAL AUTHORITIES

The government has asked parents to keep their children at home, wherever possible, and asked schools to remain open only for those children who absolutely need to attend. 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, and all childcare providers, 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.

### [Critical worker list](#)

The full guidance can be found **here**:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>

## FURTHER READING

General Information for workers and their families around COVID-19 can be found **here**:  
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public>

More Information for Officers and Reps on COVID-19 can be found **here**:  
<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

Public health matters what Officers and reps need to know about COVID – 19 found **here**:  
<https://publichealthmatters.blog.gov.uk/2020/01/23/wuhan-novel-coronavirus>