

HAZARDS CAMPAIGN

What is your employer doing during the current crisis over COVID-19 pandemic to support workers and the community?

Decent work shouldn't be indecent even when there is a crisis. It can be challenging and there are a number of issues/conditions that workers should be negotiating with management to ensure that the health and safety of staff and others who may be affected by work activities is paramount. This includes the pay, terms and conditions on which they are employed. In addition, it will be necessary to enhance or protect existing pay and conditions to protect other staff and communities. If you have any more examples of good practice, please send them to mail@gmhazards.org.uk so that we can circulate them.

Covid-19 or Corona virus is a usually mild illness with chief symptoms being dry cough, fever and fatigue but it can cause serious illness in people with underlying illness and can be fatal. Some people especially over 70s and those with known illnesses are aware they are at higher risk, but many might be without knowing. It is possible to have the illness and be asymptomatic but anyone who has it can spread it. Covid is spread by droplets sneezed or coughed out by infected people and inhaled directly or spread by contact of infected hands with surfaces we all touch. Best advice is that we all act as if we may have it and act to prevent passing it on.

We need to ensure employers continue to consult safety reps, which is their duty under the SRSC Regs. Employers have duties of care under the Health and Safety At Work Act. They have to assess and control the risks under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations. Working together with union representatives employers can do their best to protect workers' health, safety and welfare and also that of their customers and communities and protect their businesses too.

Preventing Transmission is key control method

This means maintaining social/physical distancing, isolation of those with symptoms, plus increased personal and workplace hygiene. Where possible workers should work at 2 metres apart, use tissues for sneezes and cough, and prevent contact as far as possible, plus frequent cleaning all common surfaces, encouraging and enabling frequent handwashing with soap and water plus paper towels or alcohol based sanitisers where appropriate.

To achieve this a few companies are closing sites to visitors and segregating workers to reduce any spread of the virus from people delivering, and other off-site workers who are essential to be on site.

Many organisations have outsourced, agency and other contracted workers in canteens and cleaning etc. To prevent transmission, to protect their own health and that of all other workers, customers - and the business interests - these workers should be treated in all respects the same as permanent staff and their pay, terms

and conditions should be increased to include all of the conditions below and if they are unable to agree then services should be brought in house.

Conditions to ensure and enable the best prevention of transmission of the virus

- All sickness absence monitoring to cease.
- Full sick pay paid to all staff regardless of length of service or where their entitlement has reduced or expired.
- No reduction in pay for staff who are self-isolating or caring for someone who is at risk.
- No reduction in pay for any worker having to take time away to look after their children.
- No redundancy consultations. All redundancies suspended.
- No restructuring unless it is because of the current crisis and agreed.
- All new disciplinaries postponed.
- All other grievances/disciplinaries/capabilities/and Appeals to only go ahead on a case by case basis in agreement with the trade unions.
- Those workers considered to be vulnerable to Coronavirus e.g. workers over 60 and those with underlying health conditions must be allowed to self-isolate and/or work from home if they so wish.
- Business continuity meetings must include representatives from the trade unions.
- Urgent reviews/risk assessments must be carried out with the involvement and collaboration of all staff and health and safety reps, to determine what work must be done and what can be done differently or postponed in order to reduce unnecessary contact with public e.g. telephone assessments instead of face to face meetings.
- Extend or introduce counselling services for all staff
- End hot desking.
- Where possible allow workers to vary working hours to reduce risk of infection on congested public transport.
- Where workers are on zero hours contracts they must be consulted and supported with average hours pay, guarantees of resumed hours, advice and support with signing on and negotiating with landlords etc. to suspend payments
- Cleaning needs to be methodical and in depth with safe risk assessed chemicals and appropriate PPE
- All risk assessments that specify control measures including PPE must be provided or the job suspended
- Hardship funds need to be set up by employers
- Communication must continue for all staff at work and at home
- There may be staff stranded in other countries who either need to be brought home or supported in situ
- Similarly, students in higher or college education may need additional support if they are away from home to enable them to get home or supported in situ
- In addition, some teachers may be asked to provide online support or lessons this must be negotiated with restrictions about the times, hours online, facilities to work at home at DSE standards and with appropriate training, resources and support

- All home workers must have adequate breaks, work normal hours and ensure a life work balance
- Reasonable adjustments must be agreed for workers with mental or physical disabilities in new working environments
- Safety reps have the right to be consulted on the introduction of all new working procedures and working environments and these must be risk assessed
- Section 44. Employment Rights Act says that employees have the 'right' to withdraw, refuse work that is a risk of serious and imminent danger without risk of being dismissed <https://section44.co.uk/> Workers may need to use this, to keep themselves and their colleagues safe and hold employers to their legal duty to protect them from risks to their health, safety and welfare.
- All incidents, near misses and work related physical and mental injuries/harm must be recorded in accident books

Employers must consult safety reps, which is their duty under the SRSC Regs. Employers have duties of care under the Health and Safety At Work Act. They have to assess and control the risks under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations. We also need to make sure that any breaches of these are recorded, taken through procedure and that enforcement bodies are informed. None of us know how long we are going to be experiencing these circumstances and safety reps should consider alternative means of reviewing data and procedures and practices to support their members. This could be electronically, video conferencing phone etc.

Additional Information

The TUC ran a webinar on Covid-19. Coronavirus at work and you can [watch a recording of it here](#). The TUC also plans to publish questions and answers and to run another webinar in a week or two. Other useful resources include:

- TUC [guidance for unions on COVID-19](#)
- TUC [#SickPayForAll campaign](#)
- [Coronavirus support group for workers](#)
- Local [mutual aid groups](#)
- Coronavirus and claiming [Universal Credit](#)
- MIND guidance on [coronavirus and your wellbeing](#)
- [Hazards Campaign leaflet](#) on risk assessments, rights of safety reps etc
- [Guide to using technology](#) for remote meetings, home working etc

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