

Manufacturing update 3:

What's essential and what should I do if I'm asked to attend work?



While government instructions have been late and unclear throughout this process with 'advice' issued leaving more questions than answers, Unite has been very clear that we will leave no stone unturned in our fight to secure your safety, your financial and job security. On Monday evening the Prime Minister made an impassioned plea for people to take the pandemic seriously, work from home where you can and limit any social contact outside of the home. Advice not to gather in groups larger than two, not to use public transport unless you're an 'essential worker' and to shop irregularly for foodstuff, medical and essential supplies was given and followed up by the closure of most public spaces and retail outlets. Many workers in manufacturing however will have been told by their employers to attend work as normal.

Government advice for manufacturing is that so long as workers are able they should continue to work as normal. Clearly many of our members will be producing essential products such as foodstuffs, medical equipment, pharmaceuticals, fuels, paper products and packaging for other essential industries, many others will be servicing and maintaining essential equipment and vehicles or supplying them in their respective supply chains. In these circumstances guidance is clear and obvious; if not subject to other restrictions such as self-isolation, workers should continue to work as normal. **It is essential however, that employers ensure risk assessments are completed and measures taken to protect workers health and safety, avoid close contact and provide proper and adequate personal protective equipment.**

WHAT IS THE UNION SAYING:

- ⇒ While we seek further clarity and action from government on this, all workers asked to remain at work should be protected by their employer with specific measures taken to **enforce social distancing (two metres apart) and the provision of adequate personal protective equipment.**
- ⇒ Workers should **avoid using public transport** and if this is not possible arrangements should be put in place to **stagger start and break times and avoid rush hours.**
- ⇒ **Canteens, rest and other shared facilities** must be safe spaces which if remaining open must ensure safe **distancing measures** and strict **cleaning regimes** are in place and enforced.
- ⇒ **Where businesses are not producing or supplying for 'essential industries' and are unable to ensure adequate and proper protection is in place, workers should be placed on protected lay-off and workplaces temporarily closed until such times as it's safe to re-open.**
- ⇒ Workers in such circumstances should be placed on the Job Retention Scheme; providing **government pay protection at 80% of gross pay for employees** (to a maximum of £2500 per month). See Update 2 for details of how employers claim under the JRS.

Following negotiations with employers **we expect workers to receive the remaining 20% to make up full pay for all workers, including any agency and contractors on-site.** If the taxpayer can play its part so can business and we are very clear that **those employers that attempt to ignore advice, put workers at unnecessary risk and profit before people in a national emergency will be called out - publicly and loudly!**

The union has issued **detailed health and legal guidance** which should be used by our officers and shop stewards to assist in negotiations with employers. The guidance can be found on the Coronavirus page on the unions website at <https://unitetheunion.org/campaigns/coronavirus-covid-19-advice/>

In solidarity

Steve Turner
Assistant General Secretary