



UNITE TRANSPORT & FOOD UPDATE

COVID-19 Update No.3 – Social Distancing: It’s still 2 metres

Social distancing has been reviewed across the 4 UK nations. But the recommended distance remains 2m. The Prime Minister said, ‘**Where it is possible to keep 2m apart people should**’. Otherwise it’s ‘1m plus’ – 1m together with measures such as face coverings and screens in **England**. In **Scotland** it remains 2m, and also in **Wales**, where the law says in addition employers ‘must take all reasonable measures to ensure a 2m distance’. **Northern Ireland** has reduced the distance to 1m. For our members across the UK, regardless of what else is changing, Unite’s advice is – stick to 2m. It’s safer. It’s been engrained in people’s minds since lockdown, many workplaces are geared up to 2m, and a number of employers agree with us. Where 2m isn’t possible, we need extra control measures, better hygiene, and PPE. We want a revitalised economy, but achieved safely with no rise in COVID-19 infections or fatalities.

Social distancing: the first months of lockdown

The 2m rule in the UK was enforced with fines and arrests – disproportionately for BAEM people. But confusion around 2m has been a major issue across Unite sectors, including Transport and Food, and has led to disputes and walkouts including in **FDA** and in **Road Transport**. In some jobs, such as engineers in rail and in food sites, and docks stevedores, it has proved impossible.

When introducing the 2m rule, the UK government built in uncertainty by allowing certain sectors an opt-out. In food processing and in transport, for example, it became 2m only ‘wherever possible’. These different rules for work and home led to anxiety and confusion amongst Unite members. Officers and reps have worked tirelessly to uphold social distancing and where not possible, to urge firms to protect members in other ways, such as through PPE, and have had major successes.

Road transport, warehousing and logistics – Arrow XL – to avoid 2 people in one cab for deliveries, the second person travels separately by car.

Passenger transport – wide range of good practice with Unite reps at **Plymouth City Bus** includes 2m marking for social distancing; continued pressure from Unite reps at **Somerset Passenger Solutions** has led to social distance marshalling at each junction and on board, buses running at reduced capacity to ensure distancing.

Food, drink and agriculture – good practice at **Nestle**, with social distancing training for the 2m rule; positive measures including social distancing at **Snack Creations**, and **Premier Foods Barnsley**.

Ahead of the social distancing reviews, Unite General Secretary Len McCluskey called on the government to involve the union’s safety reps whose skills and knowledge could support any reduction. Employers in some sectors have lobbied hard for a cut in 2m to boost the economy. But supporting measures to revive employment, Unite is committed to **all** its 3 COVID-19 priorities – protecting jobs, incomes, and the safety of our members and their families. Anything less will, as Len said, ‘hamper the recovery’. We’ve experienced too many fatalities and illnesses under COVID-19. It’s taken months to make workplaces safer, especially in public-facing jobs such as public transport and retail. Our reps must be involved in safe return to work plans and risk assessments on behalf of Unite’s members. That includes their concerns about social distancing.

Unite new Social Distancing policy – essential guidance for workplace reps from Unite Health & Safety:

<https://unitetheunion.org/media/3162/027-unitesocialdistancingpolicy-20-06-24-v02a.pdf>

Find Unite’s up to date guidance on Risk Assessments here: <https://unitetheunion.org/media/3132/009-riskassessments-2020-06-08-v04a.pdf>

And all Unite COVID-19 advice here: <https://unitetheunion.org/campaigns/coronavirus-covid-19-advice/>

