UNITE SOCIAL DISTANCING POLICY

Summary Policy

Despite government changes to Covid related laws in connection with the roads map, organisations will still be legally required to protect workers under health and safety law.

- Trade union safety reps need to be consulted and any social distancing measures agreed through a risk assessment approach.
- Negotiate with employers to maintain the current position until there is a significant reduction in Covid infections and hospitalisations
- Keep a 2 metre rule in workplaces wherever possible
- Ensure adequate ventilation
- Maintain current controls where they exceed the minimum
- New risk assessments justify any change in distancing and controls
- Additional control measures implemented when working under 2 metres
- Enhanced cleaning and hygiene and PPE in relation to any work under 2 metres
- Full involvement of Unite reps in all assessments decisions

The most recent Covid-19 guidance from the UK government applies only to England. Separate advice exists for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

Using trade union safety reps to assist safe opening of workplaces

The government and individual workplaces must put the tens of thousands of highly skilled experts to best use in ensuring the safety of workplaces. Being serious about re-opening the economy safely means, as the government has repeatedly pledged, doing whatever it takes to build public and workforce confidence. Unite can offer the considerable expertise of its safety reps to assist workplaces. Involving union safety reps is a major investment in public and worker confidence.

Negotiate with employers to maintain the current position until there is a significant reduction in Covid infections and hospitalisations

Unite and its members are desperate to see the revitalisation of all industries and sectors, but it must be done safely, based on good science. A vital factor for Unite is the potential human cost of increased infection risk, with people off work sick, self-isolating and a higher death rate. 2 metre social distancing should be maintained wherever possible. It is an imperfect measure since several studies from 2020 are showing that certain size droplets can travel much further, depending on ambient temperatures and air flow. Some of the findings show a reduction in risk of 82 per cent with a physical distance of 1 metre, compared to no separation in both health-care and community settings. However, every additional 1 metre of separation more than doubled the relative protection, with data available up to 3 metre. So 2 metres affords at least double the protection of 1 metre. UK Government scientific advisers have said that the risk at 1 metre could be anything from 2 to 10 times that at 1 metre.

There is a widespread view that the relaxation of legal controls, including social distancing of 2 metres, is unwise, and possibly foolhardy until the there is a significant reduction in infections and hospitalisations. In addition many industries are now geared up to

accommodate 2 metre social distancing. The concept is embedded in risk assessments, procedures, training and physical aids such as signs and floor markings. An important factor is people's behaviour, 2 metres is now engrained in the way they work and live. This mind set will be difficult to erode, as will the trust and acceptance that goes with it.

Face coverings

Where face coverings are used they need to reach the World Health Organisation (WHO) standard:

- Consisting of at least three layers of different materials
- With an inner layer being an absorbent material like cotton, and a
- Middle layer of non-woven materials such as polypropylene (for the filter) and an
- Outer layer, which is a non - absorbent material such as a polyester or a polyester blend.

The safety of all those at work should continue to be based on 2 metre separation where practical, since this is clearly an effective, and well-established, risk reduction measure. Furthermore it will help to instil confidence in the workforce that there safety and health is not being put at greater risk.

Maintaining current controls where they exceed the minimum

Where organisations already have good controls in place which exceed the minimum requirement, they should be retained. This applies to all controls, such as health checks, social distancing, physical barriers and PPE. New risk assessments will need to justify any change in distancing and controls.

Any proposed changes in the workplace must be subject to further risk assessment by the employer, with full written justification for those changes. This includes any proposals to relax workplace separation. Health risk assessments must be completed that take account of the effects of the Covid-19 virus on higher risk groups. So for example BAEM group are at high risk of more severe outcomes including death, especially with additional health issues such as cardiovascular disease, hypertension , atrial fibrillation, diabetes, obesity, COPD, asthma and so on. Women who are pregnant, and especially BAEM women, are in a particular high risk group. The risk assessment should identify additional control measures in order to keep these groups safe, including possible shielding, working from home, redeployment or work in low risk areas. See Unite Covid-19 guidance, which includes risk assessment and BAEM.

Additional control measures implemented when working under 2 metres

If there is absolutely no alternative to achieving 2 metre separation in the workplace, in those situations where this applies employers must implement additional controls.

These must be based on risk assessment and on applying the hierarchy of controls. If these conditions are not met and there is a risk of workers being exposed to people not wearing masks, then the minimum requirement is an FFP2 mask.

Where risk assessments identify more effective control measures further up the hierarchy of control such as solid barriers, then those controls must be used. Risk assessment will continue to be the main element in selecting appropriate control measures.

Enhanced cleaning and hygiene and PPE in relation to any work under 2 metres

In all cases regardless of social distancing requirements there must continue to be a strong emphasis on good hygiene, enhanced cleaning and good ventilation. Where there is any requirement for people to work within 2 metres of each other enhanced cleaning and hygiene measures and good ventilation must be put in place Full involvement of Unite reps in all assessments decisions In the case of all risk assessments and control decisions there must be full consultation with, and involvement of, Unite representatives.

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