

Health and Safety Guide coronavirus/Covid-19

for Officers and Representatives

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for Officers and Representatives

Rob Miguel, Unite National Health and Safety Advisor

Introduction

Unite has concerns regarding workers' protection against the more transmissible Covid-19 variants most recently Omicron, that are now circulating in the UK. The risk is compounded by the fact there is now strong evidence that the virus can be transmitted via airborne particles, creating increased risks of infection particularly in indoor workplaces. England has moved to [Plan B](#) in response to the risks of the Omicron variant.

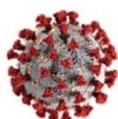
Regular updated information for England and all the devolved countries can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

UK Health Authorities Covid-19

Regular updated daily health advice regarding Covid-19 & variants provided from all the health authorities for England, all the devolved nations and Republic of Ireland below:

- [England: Public Health England \(PHE\)](#) now replaced by
- [UK Health Security Agency](#)
- [Scotland: NHS Scotland](#)
- [Northern Ireland: Public Health Agency](#)
- [Wales: Public Health Wales / Iechyd Cyhoeddus Cymru](#)
- [Republic of Ireland: Health Service Executive\(HSE\) / Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Slainte](#)

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.

Although the symptoms can be varied, the new variant [Omicron](#) is showing different symptoms including sneezing and fatigue, loss of taste and smell are less prevalent.

There needs to be a step change in current infection prevention and control guidance, airborne transmission is now an important factor. Particular emphasis around **vaccine progression, testing, adequate ventilation, and use of masks and face coverings** is essential. See Unites suite of guidance on our [COVID web site](#).

Government Guidance for Workplaces

The government updated its guidance for businesses on working safely during Coronavirus [Working Safely during Corona Virus \(Covid-19\)](#) the guidance has been produced by the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and contains links to devolved Countries and Sector guidance. Reproduced below for convenience:

WALES [Keep Wales safe at work \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)

SCOTLAND [Coronavirus in Scotland - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

NI [Coronavirus: Guide to making workplaces safer and priority sector list \(nibusinessinfo.co.uk\)](#)

ROI <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/22829a-return-to-work-safely-protocol/>

Many businesses operate more than one type of workplace, such as an office, factory and fleet of vehicles. You may need to use more than one of these guides as you think through what you need to do to keep people safe. Each sector guide has links to devolved nations:

- [Construction and other outdoor work](#)
Guidance for people who work in or run outdoor working environments
- [Events and attractions](#) - Settings related to events and visitor attractions.
- [Hotels and guest accommodation](#)
Guidance for people who work in or run hotels or other guest accommodation
- [Offices, factories and labs](#) Guidance for people who work in or run offices, factories, plants, warehouses, labs and research facilities and similar indoor environments.
- [Restaurants, pubs, bars, nightclubs and takeaway services](#) Guidance for people who work in or run restaurants, pubs, bars, cafes, nightclubs or takeaways.

HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

[Comprehensive government guidance introduced for health professionals](#). Includes guidance on the assessment and management of suspected UK cases, current information on **investigation and initial clinical management of possible cases** of Covid-19. Also preparing for an assessment of a possible case of Covid-19 and precautionary procedures.

[Guidance on infection prevention and control for Covid-19](#). Sustained community transmission is occurring across the UK. The guidance is issued jointly by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), Public Health Wales (PHW), Public Health Agency (PHA) Northern Ireland, Health Protection Scotland (HPS)/National Services Scotland, Public Health England (PHE) and NHS England for health and care organisations.

See **Doctors in Unite** web pages which has their views on COVID 19:

<https://doctorsinunite.com/health-safety/>

TRANSPORT GUIDANCE

TRAVEL TO WORK

Modes of transport include walking, cycling, and travelling in vehicles or on public transport during the coronavirus outbreak, details found in: [Safer travel guidance for passengers](#)

TRANSPORT OPERATORS' DUTIES

The guide [Coronavirus safer transport guidance for operators](#) is intended for transport organisations in England, It outlines measures to assess and address the risks of coronavirus (Covid-19). The guide will give Unite officers and reps a good feel of what is required from transport operators, there is different guidance for [Northern Ireland](#), [Scotland](#) and [Wales](#).

EDUCATION

[Guidance for schools: coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)

The guidance sets out what school leaders, teachers and school staff need to do during the coronavirus outbreak.

Guidance for parents and carers

[What parents and carers need to know about early years providers, schools and colleges during COVID-19 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

- [Supporting your children's education during coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)

INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL AND IMMIGRATION

- [Guidance for British citizens travelling abroad](#)
- [What you need to do if you're travelling to the UK](#)
- [Foreign travel advice for each country](#)
- [Safer air travel guidance for passengers](#)
- [Get support if you're waiting to return to the UK](#)
- [Essential international travel guidance](#)
- [Guidance for visa applicants in the UK and abroad](#)

RISK ASSESSMENT

Unite is advocating a risk assessment approach using a hierarchy of control common in good health and safety management, **no work should start without an up to date risk assessment. Consultation with the union and our representatives will be the key to success, set up a Covid-19 Task Group made up of trade union reps and management.**

- **Unite Guide Covid-19 Risk Assessment and Procedures** [here](#)
- Identifying Infection at work and [controlling the risks in the workplace](#)
- HSE guide to risk assessment [here](#)
- Covid-19 Risk assessment [here](#)

BIOLOGICAL AGENTS SUCH AS CORONAVIRUS

The Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens ACDP has an **approved list of biological agents**. Covid-19 is a new virus, however previous coronaviruses are listed [here](#).

Vaccination

Vaccination together with other preventative measures such as testing, ventilation, social distancing, and hygiene controls are the most effective way to reduce transmission, deaths and severe illness from Covid-19. A national immunisation campaign has been underway since early December 2020. Find here vaccination information updates including: [Coronavirus vaccine - weekly summary of Yellow Card reporting - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Current Information on Infection rates, deaths, hospitalisation rates and vaccine rates, for UK: [UK government data and insights on Coronavirus \(Covid-19\)](#).

The total /daily infection rates and deaths globally and for each country and be accessed on the [World Health Organisation's \(WHO\) Covid-19 dashboard](#).

Covid-19 has spread rapidly too many countries around the globe and now requires national and international co-ordinated infection controls. Here is the World Health Organisation [\(WHO\) dashboard](#) which is regularly updated.

Airborne Transmission

Respiratory infections can be transmitted by airborne and contact spread. Airborne spread occurs through droplets of different sizes. Larger droplets fall to the ground and on surfaces at around 1 metre, while small droplets ("aerosols") are suspended in the air and can travel several metres. Breathing in these aerosols can result in clinical infection especially in poorly ventilated indoor spaces. Outdoors is much safer, but distancing is still important. [Useful Guide by Doctors in Unite union](#). **Ventilation will play an important factor in controlling airborne transmission see [Unite Guidance](#) and [TUC Guidance](#)**

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)

The global pandemic of Covid-19 has created an incredible demand for PPE, however PPE is now more readily available. The government's [UK strategy and plan for PPE](#) covers both healthcare and non-healthcare settings. Unite feels this strategy produced in April last year needs an urgent review given the emergence of new variants and acceptance of airborne transmission.

Unite wants an independent revision of the PPE Covid-19 strategy for the UK. In both health care and non-health care settings. It has become clear from concerns our members are expressing that health care workers need a higher level of PPE, and PPE needs to be made available to sectors outside those listed in current guidance.

How does it stand at – present:

PPE in health and social care settings

UK 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. Please see below latest guides agreed by the four devolved health authorities.

The UK government and devolved administrations 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.

- [PPE in Health Care](#)
- [PPE in Community and Social Care settings](#)
- [PPE Aerosol Generating Procedures](#)
- [PPE in Non - Aerosol Generating Procedures](#)

Many trusts are moving to supplying their front line staff with FFP2/3 type masks, as opposed to medical masks.

PPE in non-health/social care settings

The UK government and devolved administrations have published guidance for those in non-health care settings on which sectors should be using PPE for Covid-19 as follows:

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

Current guidance for both settings: The [government's PPE Hub](#) and the HSE [Personal Protective Equipment Covid-19](#) guidance.

Hygiene Controls

Hygiene controls are a major factor in controlling infection rates, Unite's [workplace procedural infection controls and facilities PDF](#) sets the scene for good practice

Testing for coronavirus (Covid-19)

[Get tested for Covid-19](#) Find out about the different types of Covid-19 test, how to get tested.

[Regular rapid lateral flow tests](#) Find out how to get rapid lateral flow tests for Covid-19 if you do not have symptoms and why twice-weekly testing is important.

[How to do a test at home or at a test site](#) Find out how to do rapid lateral flow tests that give a quick result, and PCR tests that are sent to a lab)

[Test results](#) Find out how you get your Covid-19 test result, what it means /what you need to do

[Antibody testing to check if you've had Covid-19](#) Details on Find out what a Covid-19 antibody test can tell you and who can get a test

Surge testing Details from [GOV.UK: Surge testing for new Covid-19 variants](#)

Related services

[GOV.UK: register a PCR home test kit](#)

[GOV.UK: report a COVID-19 rapid lateral flow test result](#)

[NHS guidelines for healthcare staff self-testing for coronavirus using a Lateral Flow Device \(LFD\)](#)

NHS Test and Trace Support

Unite continues to fight for workers to receive full pay from day one. There is government backed financial support administered through local authorities, for details and how to claim go: [Claiming financial support under the test and trace support scheme](#).

Self – Isolation all you need to know

- [When to self-isolate and what to do](#)
- [How long to self-isolate](#)
- [How to avoid spreading coronavirus to people you live with](#)
- [How to treat your symptoms at home](#)
- [Help and financial support while you're self-isolating](#)
- [What to do if your symptoms get worse](#)
- [What to do if you get symptoms again](#)

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.

WORKING WITH DISPLAY SCREEN EQUIPMENT

There is no increased risk from display screen equipment (DSE) for those working at home temporarily. However see the [practical workstation checklist](#) that workers can complete.

SPECIALISED DSE EQUIPMENT NEEDS

Employers should try to meet those needs where possible.

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.

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.

Full guide [Unite Guide Home Working Covid-19](#)



New York Times article:

The tech headaches of working from home and how to remedy them

From shoddy Wi-Fi to digital distractions, our tech can make remote work miserable. Here's how to overcome the problems – [full article](#).

See also [HSE guidance on home working](#).

MENTAL HEALTH CONSIDERATIONS DURING COVID-19 OUTBREAK

World Health Organisation: The following principals were developed by the Mental Health Department at [WHO as support for mental and psychological wellbeing during Covid-19](#).

- 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.
- 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.
- 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 the WHO website and local health authorities' platforms, in order to help you distinguish facts from rumours.
- 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.

For more information please refer to the [Unite Mental Health Guide](#).

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

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 found in the [Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999](#).

Specific legislation applying to infectious micro-organisms/biological agents, of which coronavirus is a group, comes under the auspices of the [Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 \(COSHH\) \[PDF\]](#).

Access the latest [advice from the HSE on specific elements of Covid-19](#).

Working safely during the coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak

The following is a suite of guidance from HSE that reps will find extremely useful. Unite engages with HSE on various government Industrial Advisory Committees in most sectors, we are therefore very influential in advising HSE on the guidance they produce.

- [Risk assessment](#)
- [Social distancing](#)
- [Cleaning, hygiene and handwashing](#)
- [Ventilation and air conditioning](#)
- [Talk to workers and provide information](#)
- [Working from home](#)
- [Vulnerable workers](#)

FURTHER ESSENTIAL READING TUC GUIDE - [Covid guide: Help for Union Reps](#)