

Health and Safety Guide to Covid-19

for Unite Officers and Representatives

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Health and Safety Guide Covid-19

Officers and Representatives

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Introduction

Covid-19 restrictions have been replaced by public health advice

1 April 2022

The government has replaced guidance for workplaces produced by BEIS for **England** and put in place public health guidance, which set out the principles for [reducing the spread of respiratory infections, including Covid-19, in the workplace](#)

Both the government and HSE are issuing guidance which supports the premise that every employer need not explicitly consider Covid-19 in their health and safety risk assessment. Instead advising employers that **they may choose to continue** to cover Covid-19 in their risk assessments.

See HSE guidance here: [Coronavirus \(Covid-19\) – Advice for workplaces \(hse.gov.uk\)](#)

Risk Assessments

Unite is advising officers and reps to engage with their organisations to ensure that risk assessments continue with the view that protective measures against Covid-19 remain in place. Infection rates and hospital admissions are rising significantly, updated figures can be accessed [here](#). Unite risk assessment guide can be found on our Covid web site [here](#).

Most large employers Unite is involved with are not pulling away from risk assessment, although some are starting to consider a more generic approach and assessing risks around infectious diseases in general. Particularly respiratory infection that includes Covid-19 and Influenza. This would bring risk assessment in line with the new public health guidance, and at the same time ensure retention the main raft of controls we have all been accustomed.

Position in all nations

Moving to public health advice in all nations will occur at different times and/or differ. The concept however is being consulted on so check the latest Covid-19 position and timescales of any changes for all nations:

- [England](#)
- [Scotland](#)
- [Wales](#)
- [Northern Ireland](#)
- [ROI](#)

Health and Safety Legal Obligations

There is a general legal duty to undertake risk assessment and put in place protective measures, where there is a risk to safety and health. This is set out in the [management regulations](#). A regulation which HSE has been able to enforce that Covid-19 risk assessments are undertaken throughout the pandemic.

Covid-19 remains a risk to all workers' therefore Unite advises risk assessments must continue even if the assessments move to a more generic assessment form that includes all respiratory diseases. The result will be that controls will remain on very similar lines, with HSE intending to regulate the controls for Covid-19 under existing law. For example:

Covid-19/Infection controls

[Providing sufficient general ventilation, welfare facilities](#) for hygiene, will be regulated under the [Workplace \(Health, Safety and Welfare\) Regulations 1992](#) for most workplaces, and the [Construction Design and Management Regulations 2015](#) for construction sites.

People who come into contact with Covid-19 due to their work activity

The **Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations** [COSHH Regulations](#), cover the duty to assess risks for biological hazards. Under this law employers must protect workers who come into contact with Covid-19, under the following circumstances:

- Directly through their work, for example in researching the virus in laboratories
- Due to their work activity, such as health and social care workers caring for infectious patients

Under this law employers must carry out COSHH risk assessments specifically for Covid-19 and implement control measures.

Under current HSE guidance on Covid-19 COSHH does not cover situations where:

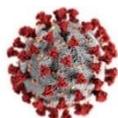
1. One employee catches a respiratory infection from another
2. A member of the public has infected an employee with coronavirus through general transmission in the workplace

Of the above two clauses **number 1 is contained in the COSHH guidance, whilst number 2 is not** set out as such. Therefore we feel that HSE's position on COSHH in relation to Covid-19 sets out a band of sectors which is too narrow, and should include more front line workers such as those in education, transport and so on. However it is likely employers will follow the HSE line, therefore officers and reps are advised to negotiate Covid-19/respiratory infection risk assessments are undertaken under the management regulations.

Unite has written to HSE with the concerns as set out above, the guidance in connection with COSHH can be found on the HSE website here:

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) – Advice for workplaces \(hse.gov.uk\)](#)

Current Information Virus and Variants



Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses common across the world that can cause illness such as respiratory tract infections. Central symptoms of Covid-19 (SARS-COV-2) include fever and a cough, loss of taste and smell. [Symptoms](#) though can be varied and wide ranging.

Variants of Concern/sub lineages/spike mutations

The following is an excellent site that produce current information and tables on Covid-19 variants, [SARS-COV-2 Variants of Concern](#) and is produced by the **European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control ECDPC**. The site is regularly updated to reflect the current position on:

- **Variants of concern (VOC):** clear evidence is available indicating a significant impact on transmissibility, severity and/or immunity.
- **Variants of Interest:** evidence is available that implies impact on transmissibility, severity and/or immunity, but the evidence is associated with major uncertainty
- **Variants under monitoring:** There is some indication that they could have properties similar to those of a **VOC**, but the evidence is weak
- **Variants that have been de-escalated:** Based on at least one the following criteria: (1) No longer circulating, (2) Circulating for a long time without any impact (3) scientific evidence demonstrates its not associated with any concerning properties

Below is an extract from a table on the site titled **Variants of Concern** with the extract showing the latest variant of concern the Omicron variant.

WHO label	Lineage + additional mutations	Country first detected (community)	Spike mutations of interest	Year and month first detected	Impact on transmissibility	Impact on immunity	Impact on severity	Transmission in EU/EEA
Omicron	B.1.1.529	South Africa and Botswana	(x)	November 2021	Increased (v) (13, 14)	Increased (v) (15-21)	Reduced (v) (22-27)	Dominant

X above equals all spike mutations of omicron, all of which are set out in full on the ECDPC site.

All sub-lineages of the listed lineages are also included in the variant, e.g., BA.2 is included in Omicron as it is a sub-lineage of B.1.1.529.

To simplify the central results produced within the above table: Omicron including sub lineages and spike mutations is noted as: **More transmissible**, has resulted in **increased immunity** and well documented to have **reduced impact on severity**.



Guidance for People with Symptoms of Respiratory Infection Including Covid-19

[Guidance for people with symptoms of a respiratory infection including Covid-19, or a positive test result for Covid-19 in England](#)

The drive from government appears to be leaning towards including Covid-19 in a category of respiratory infections, it's important to note that there will still be an emphasis on prevention and reducing the spread of Covid-19 and other infections.

Who the guidance is for?

Most people can no longer access free testing for Covid-19. This guidance covers two aspects:

1. Actions you can take to protect other people if you are unwell with symptoms of a respiratory infection, including Covid-19, and you have not taken a test for Covid-19.
2. Advice for people who have taken a Covid-19 test and have received a positive test result.

There is [separate guidance for people who have been informed by the NHS that they are at highest risk](#) of becoming seriously unwell and who might be eligible for new Covid-19 treatments. Link at top of page will access whole document or click on any title below to access individual topics:

- [Higher risk of Serious illness from a respiratory infection including Covid-19](#)
- [Symptoms of respiratory infections, including Covid-19](#)
- [What to do if you have symptoms and have not taken a Covid-19 test](#)
- [Children and young people \(aged 18 years and under\) who have symptoms](#)
- [What to do if you have a positive Covid-19 test result](#)
- [If you're a close contact of someone who had a positive test result for Covid-19](#)
- [Children and young people aged 18 years and under who have a positive test result](#)

People with Symptoms: Devolved nations and ROI

- [Scotland](#) (Covid-19) Guidance for individuals with possible coronavirus infection
- [Wales](#) Guidance for people with Covid-19 and their contacts
- [NI](#) Covid-19 symptoms what to do
- [ROI](#) Advice symptoms, testing, self- isolation

Long Covid

About long Covid

- How long it takes to recover from Covid-19 is different for everybody.
- Many people feel better in a few days or weeks and most will make a full recovery within 12 weeks. But for some people, symptoms can last longer.
- The chances of having long-term symptoms does not seem to be linked to how ill you are when you first get Covid-19.
- People who had mild symptoms at first can still have long-term problems.

Symptoms of long Covid

There are lots of symptoms you can have after a Covid-19 infection.

Common long Covid symptoms include:

- extreme tiredness (fatigue)
- shortness of breath
- chest pain or tightness
- problems with memory and concentration ("brain fog")
- difficulty sleeping (insomnia)
- heart palpitations
- dizziness
- pins and needles
- joint pain
- depression and anxiety
- tinnitus, earaches
- feeling sick, diarrhoea, stomach aches, loss of appetite
- a high temperature, cough, headaches, sore throat, changes to sense of smell or taste
- rashes

Getting the help you need

Recovering from Covid-19 may become difficult, and have had an impact on your mind and body. These symptoms should get better over time, some taking longer than others, but there are things you can do to help, and support is available:

- [Get support on your Covid-19 recovery on the NHS website](#)
- [Find help and support if you have long Covid](#)

Self – Isolation all you need to know

[You're no longer required by law to stay at home \(self-isolate\)](#). The NHS Test and Trace contact tracing service has now closed. If the NHS Covid-19 app advises you to self-isolate, please update the app to the latest version.

Check advice in other parts of the UK:

- [Scotland – NHS Inform: guidance for individuals with possible Covid-19 infection](#)
- [Wales – Welsh government: self-isolation](#)
- [Northern Ireland – nidirect: self-isolating and close contacts](#)
- ROI [Self-isolation \(stay in your room\) - HSE.ie](#)

Health Professionals

[Comprehensive government guidance introduced for health professionals](#). This 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.

[Covid-19 Guidance for Ambulance Service](#). This guidance is for ambulance sector settings to use in preventing transmission of SARS-CoV-2 and other seasonal respiratory infection during winter of 21/22.

More on all nations

- [Public Health Scotland](#) For health and social care and other settings in Scotland
- [Public Health Wales](#) Information health and social care in Wales
- [Northern Ireland Public Health Agency](#) Health care workers and care providers
- [Republic of Ireland HSE](#) Health protection surveillance centre guidance health care workers

[Doctors in Unite](#) has assisted Unite with providing information on Covid-19 related to health and social care. They have been very active in supporting and providing evidence for the eventual acceptance of airborne transmission of the Covid-19 virus. Including the importance of control measures such as ventilation and PPE including respiratory protection, for the benefit of all workers.

Transport guidance

Coronavirus (Covid-19): transport and travel guidance

Information for people using transport or working in the transport sector during the coronavirus outbreak.

1. [Freight, bus and road transport businesses](#)
 2. [Maritime and shipping](#)
 3. [International travel](#)
- [Scotland](#) Guide for transport operators
 - [Wales](#) Information for traveling across Covid-19
 - [NI](#) Guidance for transport operators Covid-19
 - [ROI](#) Covid-19 Transport and travel measures

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](#)
- [Essential international travel guidance](#)
- [Guidance for visa applicants in the UK and abroad](#)

Education

Operational Guidance for Schools Covid-19

[This guidance](#) explains the actions school leaders should take to manage coronavirus (Covid-19) in their school. This includes public health advice, endorsed by the United Kingdom Health Security Agency (UKHSA). It is for leaders and staff in:

- primary schools
 - secondary schools (including sixth forms)
 - special schools, special post-16 providers and alternative provision
 - 16 to 19 academies
 - infant, junior, middle, upper schools • boarding schools
- **Scotland** [Covid-19 education recovery | National Improvement Hub](#)
 - **Wales** [Schools: coronavirus guidance | GOV.WALES](#)
 - **NI** [Coronavirus \(Covid-19\): Guidance for Schools & Educational Settings in NI](#)
 - **ROI** [gov.ie - Covid-19 response plan for safe operation of primary and special schools](#)

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

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](#) web site and every mind matters on [NHS](#) web site, both provide comprehensive advice and specialist signposting.