

Knowing your rights and the support available during the Coronavirus Pandemic

Many of our members will be extremely worried about loved ones and what to do for the best during the current pandemic. Below is some guidance and advice on your workplace rights and how UNISON can help you with problems you may experience outside work.

If I have to self-isolate, will I be paid?

The health secretary has sent guidance to employers telling them staff who have been asked to self-isolate are entitled to take the time as sick leave. Although this would be good practice, and has already been agreed for NHS staff and the majority of local government staff, this does not guarantee that staff will get sick leave as a matter of course.

The Green Book (national agreement between unions and employers) for all workers employed on Local Government terms and conditions states that: "An employee who is prevented from attending work because of contact with infectious disease shall be entitled to receive normal pay. The period of absence on this account shall not be reckoned against the employee's entitlements under this scheme"

In the event that an employee is required to self-isolate or is placed in quarantine, the provision above should be applied."

Speak to your UNISON workplace representative or the Rochdale branch office 0170695952 if you are concerned your employer is not following the guidance.

Sick pay for coronavirus

Statutory sick pay is now available from the first day you are off sick, and if you are paid less than £118 a week you will be able to access Universal Credit or Contributory Employment and Support Allowance more easily.

Statutory sick pay is much too low. At £94.24 it is not enough to live on and trade unions are calling on the Government to raise it now.

Also if you're on a zero-hours contract you are not entitled to statutory sick pay, unless you can demonstrate that you earn at least £118 per week from your employer.

We are urging the government to help those on zero-hours contracts.

UNISON support for people who struggle financially because of coronavirus

If you are worried that illness or self isolation will put you in debt or cause financial hardship UNISON's welfare team (There for you) can help with debt advice, benefits advice, grants and other assistance. For more information contact us on 020 7121 5620 or email thereforyou@unison.co.uk or contact your branch welfare officer 01706925952

UNISON Debtline is available on 0800 389 3302. Lines are open from 8am to 9pm Monday to Friday, and from 9am to 3pm on Saturday.

Care Workers vs COVID-19 Campaign

Coronavirus poses a serious threat to all of us. As care workers, we are at the forefront of the struggle against the virus. We put ourselves at risk to provide direct care and support to high risk groups including the over-70s and people with underlying health conditions.

Support UNISON to stop the spread – join our campaign:

http://www.unisonnw.org/care_workers_vs_covid_19 and link to the online petition <https://action.unison.org.uk/page/58242/petition/1>

Will I hit a sickness and absence trigger point if I am required to self isolate?

If you get contractual sick pay (a rate agreed by your employer), it is good practice to ensure that such absence is not counted towards any sickness absence policy triggers. This has been agreed for NHS staff and the majority of local government staff (ie those covered by national joint council (NJC) terms and conditions.)

If you have any problems with this now or in the future you can speak to your UNISON workplace representative or phone the Rochdale branch office.

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What should my employer do if a case of COVID-19 is confirmed in the workplace?

If an employee or anyone else who has visited your workplace is confirmed as having the virus, your employer will be contacted by their local PHE health protection team to discuss the case, identify people who have been in contact with them, and advise on any actions or precautions that should be taken.

What protective equipment should I be getting from my employer?

This will depend on what you do, with whom, and where you are working. Your employer must carry out a full risk assessment and provide you with all the specialist training and the personal protective equipment (PPE) (gowns/aprons, masks, gloves, etc) that you may require.

Where a resident is showing symptoms of COVID-19, steps should be taken to minimise the risk of transmission through safe working procedures. Staff should use personal protective equipment (PPE) for activities that bring them into close personal contact, such as washing and bathing, personal hygiene and contact with bodily fluids. Aprons, gloves and fluid repellent surgical masks should be used in these situations. If there is a risk of splashing, then eye protection will minimise risk.

New PPE must be used for each episode of care. It is essential that used PPE is stored securely within disposable rubbish bags. These bags should be placed into another bag, tied securely and kept separate from other waste within the room. This should be put aside for at least 72 hours before being disposed of as normal. Care homes have well-established processes for waste management.

If neither the care worker nor the individual receiving care and support is symptomatic, then no personal protective equipment is required above and beyond normal good hygiene practices.

For more information please visit <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-residential-care-supported-living-and-home-care-guidance/covid-19-guidance-on-residential-care-provision>

Cleaning in non-healthcare (including educational settings)

If you are cleaning an area where there have been possible or confirmed cases, you should as a minimum be provided with disposable gloves and apron. Hands should be washed with soap and water after all PPE has been removed.

Additional advice

The Department for Education has a new helpline for questions related to the virus and education for staff, parents and young people. Please call 0800 046 8687. Lines open 8am to 6pm, Monday to Friday.

The government has also provided advice for social or community care and residential settings, including what to do if colleagues or residents are being tested for COVID-19, and what to do if cases are confirmed.

Local authorities should be reminded that they still have a responsibility – even where care services have been contracted out.

https://www.unison.org.uk/coronavirus-rights-work/?fbclid=IwAR0IM7Y4Hs-NCg47LJLVrR03_wVteAyf8d_JgBVrpvM2SeKUdW0rwo7xL5k