

Workers Memorial Day

The country is to be asked to observe a minute's silence next Tuesday (28 April) to remember all the health, care and other key workers who have lost their lives to coronavirus, in a campaign launched today (Monday) by three health unions. UNISON, the Royal College of Nursing and the Royal College of Midwives – who between them represent more than a million NHS and public service workers, including porters, refuse collectors and care staff – are urging politicians, employers, people at work and those on lockdown at home to join the tribute at 11am.

The minute's silence – held on International Workers' Memorial Day – will allow everyone to pay their respects and give thanks for the lives of those whose work involved caring, saving lives, keeping key services running and the rest of the country safe, say the unions. The tribute is also a show of support for the families of those who have died.

The three unions are hoping the government and other organisations will get on board and join the campaign for there to be a minute's silence on the day, which every year commemorates workers who have died around the globe.

UNISON General Secretary Dave Prentis said: "This is the ultimate tribute to remember workers who've lost their lives and put themselves in harm's way to keep us safe and vital services running. Every year the sacrifice of workers around the world is recognised, but this year has a special significance because of the pandemic.

"The minute's silence is a thank you to all the workers including nurses, midwives, cleaners and care staff who've died from this devastating virus."

Royal College of Nursing General Secretary and Chief Executive Donna

Kinnair said: "We've become used to hearing a great roar on a Thursday night for key workers, but this respectful silence will be a poignant reminder of the risks they run to keep us safe.

"I hope the public gets behind this with the same affection they show when applauding our people.

"The silence is a simple show of respect for those who have paid the very highest price, but their loved ones must know the levels of gratitude we feel as a nation and take some comfort from that."

Royal College of Midwives Chief Executive and General Secretary Gill

Walton said: "We had expected 2020 to be a celebration of the International Year of the Nurse and Midwife but, although we actively applaud their service, this is not what we had imagined.

"Instead, across the country, midwives and maternity support workers are seeing the impact of coronavirus not only on the women in their care, but on their colleagues as well.

"We are proud to join UNISON and the RCN in this campaign and to recognise and remember those who we have lost."

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UNISON has issued a joint statement calling for government reassurance that schools will not be completely re-opened until it is safe for staff to return to work

Schools across the country are mostly closed, with pupils staying at home with families and carers. However, some schools remain partially open for children who have a social worker and are under safeguarding precautions, as well as children of key workers.

UNISON has, with other unions, issued a joint statement to the government warning against fully re-opening schools until staff safety is scientifically assured.

UNISON members have been essential in keeping schools open during the COVID-19 crisis, and are already concerned that, even with the small number of pupils currently in schools, it is impossible to maintain social distancing at all times.

UNISON National Secretary Jon Richards said: "We all know that schools will re-open at some stage, but that needs to be managed sensibly and not put people's lives at risk.

"The government needs to be open with their plans and engage with UNISON and other unions early on to ensure that this isn't mishandled."

The statement co-signed by UNISON, Unite and GMB reads: "We call on the government to provide immediate reassurance to staff that any strategy for re-opening schools is discussed with relevant unions and other bodies at an early stage.

"Any proposals must be shared well in advance of any implementation, and re-opening schools should only happen once there is clear published scientific evidence that can command the confidence of the schools' workforce that it is safe to do so.

"Suggestions in the media that the government in England is considering reopening schools has caused huge anxiety amongst school staff and parents"

The statement also includes demands for sufficient PPE, cleaning supplies and regular testing.

Unions call for 10% rise for Local Government workers

Staff keeping vital local services running – including schools, refuse collection and child protection – during the pandemic deserve a proper pay rise, say the three unions representing council staff in England and Wales today (Thursday).

Responding to the 2.75% pay offer for 2020/21 made today by the Local Government Association (LGA), UNISON, Unite and the GMB are urging the Chancellor Rishi Sunak and other ministers to heed the call from the local government employers to fund a top up to reward council and school support staff.

A much-needed increase would ensure that social workers, teaching assistants, refuse collectors and others – who are going above and beyond during the crisis – can have a decent pay rise.

The three unions say the LGA offer – which also includes an extra day of leave for some – falls well short of their 10% claim for this year. They add that it fails to recognise the hard work of local government staff in keeping services running while the country is in lockdown.

The LGA has already asked the government to fund an additional pay increase in addition to its offer. The unions are calling for the employers to write a joint letter with them to Rishi Sunak and communities secretary Robert Jenrick, urging them to reward staff properly.

UNISON Head of Local Government Jon Richards said: "While many are at home, council staff are going above and beyond keeping vital local services running.

"Some are facing huge risks as they go about their work. The least the government can do is to reward them with a proper pay rise and ensure all those that need protective equipment to help keep them safe have access to it now.

"The LGA say they'd like to give council staff more but it's all cash-strapped local authorities can afford.