

Coronavirus : Protect staff at greater risk from coronavirus – act now

The Government response to the rise in positive cases and hospital admissions is inadequate.

Staff who are at greater risk of severe illness from coronavirus must be protected. Risk assessments must be kept under review as circumstances change.

Immediate action is needed to protect staff who are at greater risk from coronavirus, given the increases in case rates nationally and in some areas in particular; PHE advice which suggests that transmission risks in schools are increasing; and ONS statistics which suggest that the incidence of coronavirus among young people is higher than previously thought.

3 steps to keeping ‘greater risk’ staff safe

1. Review risk assessments

Risk assessments for all staff at greater risk from coronavirus should be reviewed and revised in line with [the joint union advice](#). Assessments need to take into account the increased case rates nationally, the (often fast moving) local context, and the circumstances of staff themselves in terms of their health, their household circumstances and their work.

The National Education Union (NEU) continues to demand that, where staff are clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) and at risk of significant harm if they contract Covid-19, arrangements should be made for them to work from home. The same should apply to women in their third trimester of pregnancy. Depending on local, domestic and workplace circumstances, this may also be the safest measure to adopt for other staff who are clinically vulnerable (CV) or have vulnerable household members.

Schools should in any case be considering how they would need to negotiate the reallocation of duties and responsibilities and maintain education in the event of increasing numbers of staff and pupils being at home.

DO NOW : If you are in one of the groups listed above, speak to your NEU workplace rep and your SLT about getting a revised risk assessment. In some cases, you will also want to ask the school to allow you to work from home whilst this is being carried out.

2. Review school safety

Schools and safety reps should be reviewing safety arrangements on an ongoing basis – referring to the joint union checklists – given the rise in positive cases and further evidence that transmission in schools is increasing.

The review should include checks on distancing, circulation and travel arrangements, routines for cleaning and ventilation, wearing of masks and PPE, bubble structures, procedures for lunch and breaks, and any other

health and safety measures that may not be working as well as they need to. It should also include a review of staff timetables and workload as well. All this should be conducted with the inclusion of the NEU rep and where possible NEU health & safety rep.

The NEU is calling on all employers to act in accordance with World Health Organisation advice that “adults aged 60 or over, or who have any underlying health conditions such as heart disease, diabetes or lung cancer, should wear a medical mask because of their higher risk of getting seriously ill from Covid-19” and therefore provide medical masks for all such staff and encourage them to wear such masks. Employers should also consider whether medical masks are appropriate to protect other staff (eg CV staff in areas with high case rates) and if so provide and encourage their use as well.

DO NOW : NEU members should ensure that safety and workload are reviewed as a matter of urgency and that action is taken on providing masks as outlined above. Read the NEU Dos and Don'ts Poster on school safety for key tips. Meet as a group and discuss matters if necessary

3. Work together to ensure those staff at greatest risk are safe

Schools need to be as safe as possible for staff, pupils and visitors regardless of whether or not they fall into one of the higher risk categories. Only by working together to support each other and using a collective voice to ensure a safe working and learning environment for the whole school community will the safest conditions be achievable for all.

DO NOW : Talk to colleagues and your NEU workplace rep about your concerns relating to coronavirus in the workplace. If you do not have an NEU rep in your workplace, consider becoming the rep – speak to your district secretary.