

An Leas-phrìomh Mhinistear agus Ath-shlànachadh
Cobhid
Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid
Recovery
John Swinney MSP



Scottish Government
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T: 0300 244 4000

Rozanne Foyer
General Secretary
Scottish Trades Union Congress
Suite 11,
Red Tree Business Unit
24 Stonelaw Road,
Rutherglen,
G73 3TW

Your ref: Self Isolation Rules for Essential Workers

29 July 2021

Dear Rozanne

Thank you for your letter regarding the STUC's concerns around changes to voluntary self-isolation rules. As Deputy First Minister and with responsibility for Covid Recovery, I would like to outline some of the background to this policy as well as offer to meet with you at your earliest convenience to discuss this issue.

The process to exempt critical workers from self-isolation was a rapid piece of work due to the nature of the resource pressures being faced in a number of organisations across Scotland's Critical National Infrastructure (CNI). We needed to act quickly in the best interests of those organisations and minimise any impact that may be felt across rest of the country.

The guidance puts workers at the heart of the process and it was developed with their welfare in mind. This is a voluntary scheme and in line with our joint statement on fair work expectations during the transition out of lockdown, no workers should be placed under direct, or indirect pressure to return to work. This should enable employers and workers to make the decisions that are in everyone's interest as we carefully reopen the economy. As such, any fully vaccinated worker who cannot reasonably isolate from ongoing exposure to Covid-19 should not be asked to return to work. We have also made it clear in the guidance that:

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“If your exemption request is approved, your business/organisation should engage with staff and union officials to make it clear that the decision not to self-isolate:

- *is voluntary*
- *subject to personal risk assessment which should consider the individuals contacts and vulnerabilities”*

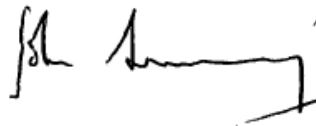
These exemptions are also made on a temporary basis and are subject to review. The next assessment on the impact will be carried out on 3 August 2021. I would also emphasise that the exemptions apply only where a business or organisation is considered a part of our CNI and where vital services would be affected if the exemption process was not in place.

As you know we have put in place strict criteria for those seeking exemption from self-isolation. This includes a requirement that the individual has had both doses of the vaccination and we know that for those who are fully vaccinated, the risk of infection is lower. Rigorous and regular testing also forms part of our approach and this, along with adherence to good hygiene, further mitigates the risk of the virus being transmitted.

The approach we are taking was following discussion with Public Health Scotland and our own clinical advisors and we will continue to work closely with these teams. I hope this provides some reassurance around your concerns on virus transmission.

I hope you find this background useful and I would be happy to have a discussion with you regarding this issue. Please contact my Private Office if you would like to have such a discussion.

Yours Sincerely,



JOHN SWINNEY

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