

WORK & CORONAVIRUS – Answers to Questions

As the COVID-19 virus spreads, find out what your rights at work are if taking sick leave or self-isolating.

UNISON members are understandably concerned both with not catching or spreading the virus and with making sure that they aren't faced with a choice between keeping people safe and paying the bills.

This short guide is about your rights at work during the outbreak. (For advice on staying safe [See here](#))

The issues and risks will vary depending on the sector you are working in, so UNISON has been proactive in negotiating jointly agreed advice in a number of sectors.

What should I do if I believe I may have the symptoms of, or have had close contact with someone who has had, COVID-19?

It has been announced by the Scottish Government that as of 13 March anyone developing symptoms consistent with COVID-19, however mild should self-isolate for 7 days.

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are recent onset of:

- new continuous cough and/or
- high temperature

If symptoms worsen during home isolation or are no better after 7 days then people should be advised to phone their GP or NHS24 (111).

In either circumstance, employers should encourage employees to self-isolate, and stay away from work. You should normally call NHS 111 for advice, except in an emergency, when you should ring 999.

Until a case is confirmed, current advice is that the employer need not apply special restrictions or special control measures. There is also no need to close the workplace.

Can my employer make me self-isolate?

Yes, your employer can instruct you not to attend your workplace.

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

This depends on where you work.

In Local Government: employees who have to self-isolate and who are unable to work from home will be granted paid leave, for the duration of the self-isolation or until they develop symptoms. If symptoms develop normal sick leave provisions apply. (See SJC Standard conditions of service Part 2, Para 8.7).

In the NHS: Employees will be entitled to payment as if at work during this period.

Members in other sectors should check with their branch as to what arrangements are [your UNISON branch](#) or if they are concerned that their employer is not following guidance.

Wherever you work if you are self isolating you will need to inform your employer.

Do I have to work while I self isolate?

Again depends on where you work and what your job is. For many people working from home is not an option. For those that can - if you are symptom free then arrangements should be made for you to work from home, where possible.

Sick pay for having 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.

Unfortunately, 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.

Will self isolation be counted towards sickness absence procedures?

Not in the case of NHS or Local Government employees – others should check local arrangements with their branch.

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

This guidance recommends that staff caring for patients with confirmed COVID-19 or suspected cases undergoing “aerosol generating procedure” should be provided with FFP3 respirator, disposable eye protection (preferably visor), long-sleeved disposable gown and gloves.

Staff caring for a patient with unconfirmed cases should be provided with fluid-resistant surgical mask, gloves, apron and eye protection if there’s a risk of splashing into the eyes.

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.

Where a higher level of contamination may have been present (for example, where unwell individuals have slept such as a hotel room or boarding school dormitory, or where there is visible contamination with body fluids), then the need for additional PPE such as a surgical face mask and full-face visor should be considered. The local health protection team will advise on this.

[Gov.uk advice on cleaning in non-healthcare settings.](#)

What should UNISON branches do if cleaning or other services are contracted out to private companies?

Branches should ensure that contracted out staff receive the same protections and rights, as far as possible, as those employed directly. This may involve initiating discussions with the main employer as well as with the contractor to ensure a joined-up approach is taken for the benefit of both service users and staff.

What else do I need to know to keep my patients, clients, pupils and colleagues safe?

Health Protection Scotland have published detailed Information and Guidance for a variety of areas including [Educational Settings](#) [Social, Community & Residential Care](#) and [many others](#).