

Transport Salaried Staffs' Association

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Introduction

The worst of the Covid-19 pandemic seems to be over, the crisis seems to be finally abating, and restrictions in place on and off for over a year are again being relaxed. However, no-one can be complacent, and we may yet see a resurgence of the virus despite the mass vaccination programme that has been rolled out.

It is therefore most important that you should be vigilant, and comply with workplace measures put in place to control the risks of infection.

You are also strongly encouraged to be vaccinated when the opportunity arises, as this is the surest way to eradicate the disease, just as smallpox and other diseases have been eradicated by vaccination programmes in the past. Anyone that has doubts about the safety of vaccinations should seek further information and support from their employer. The risks associated with contracting the disease are massively greater than any associated with being vaccinated; risks from vaccinations are minute.

You should contact our health and safety rep in your workplace if you have any concerns about the measures taken at work to protect you, and if complacency is setting in and measures such as mask wearing, social distancing and hygiene are not being strictly adhered to. Failure to continue to adhere to these invites a further resurgence of infections, and may well result in further unnecessary serious illness, hospitalisations and even death.

No employer or manager should undermine or relax Covid-19 protection arrangements before any future industry-wide agreements to do so are reached.

Over 4.3 million people in the UK have, to date, tested positive for Covid-19 since February 2020, and in excess of 127,000 individuals have died - people who are parents, grandparents, siblings, partners, colleagues, neighbours, and friends.

The latest lockdown, coupled with the mass vaccination programme, has undoubtedly led to a dramatic reduction in the numbers of infections, hospitalisations and fatalities.

As a result, the governments of each of the UK's nations have introduced cautious plans to gradually relax the measures introduced to control the virus' spread. To coincide with the latest relaxation of lockdown measures, our union is taking the opportunity to draw your attention to what has and has not changed.

What has changed in Government guidance?

Information on what has changed varies between England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Some of the staging dates of when relaxation take place also differ. Details for each nation can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

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members' helpdesk **0800 3282673**

General Secretary **Manuel Cortes**



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What remains in place following the latest Government changes?

Our message - and that of the UK's different Governments is simple: **whilst some of the measures have changed, most of the restrictions remain in place.**

This is because at each stage of the release from lockdown, it is possible that the virus will start to be spread again as people become increasingly complacent or simply abandon their previous adherence to the strict measures because of the new freedoms they believe that they have. No one wants to be the cause of another person's illness or death which is why we are writing in such blunt terms.

What this means is that members should continue to:

- Work from home if you can and minimise travel;
- Wash your hands regularly;
- Maintain 2 metre social distancing;
- Wear face coverings where required;

Information on when and where to wear face coverings is available on the UK Government's Website.¹

You should also note that face coverings could also be required in work situations where infringements of social distancing are possible (eg, in an office or on a train) and in the absence of alternative measures such as Perspex screens, etc. These arrangements should have been introduced after an appropriate risk assessment has been carried out by your employer and which must have been subject to consultation "in good time" with your TSSA rep.

What about the Railway Industry Coronavirus Forum agreements?

The RICF is continuing to meet on a fortnightly basis but apart from some recent advice about how the employers propose to approach the UK Government's decision to end the requirement for shielding for Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) employees, there has been no change to existing agreements.

All of the agreements at RICF can be found on our TSSA's Website at:
<https://www.tssa.org.uk/en/help-legal-advice/coronavirus/index.cfm>

¹ See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own>

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If you have any questions about the agreements or are concerned that they are not being followed where they work, you should contact your TSSA rep or your Organiser in the first place.

Does our previous advice remain relevant?

In January 2021 at the start of the latest Lockdown, we emailed you with extensive advice on Covid-19 in the workplace. Virtually all of that document - called "*Covid-19 emergency: protecting yourself and your colleagues*" - remains applicable (the exception being some of the details about CEV employees). In the event that you no longer have your copy of the guidance, it can be downloaded from our Website at: <https://www.tssa.org.uk/en/whats-new/news/index.cfm/tssa-updated-guidance-on-working-through-the-pandemic>

What do I do if I think I have Covid symptoms?

If you have Covid symptoms, you should stay at home and get a test:

- More information about getting a test can be found on the NHS Website at: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing/get-tested-for-coronavirus/>
- Advice on staying at home is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>

When can I get vaccinated?

The mass roll out of vaccinations has seen millions of people over the age of 50, those with underlying medical conditions as well as workers in health and social care receive at least their first dose of one of the available immunisations.

On advice from the JCVI (Joint Committee on Vaccinations and Immunisations), the Government decided not to consider requests to vaccinate particular groups of staff considered to be at particular risk because of their work but to continue with its age related approach.

The most recent age group being called forward are those in their 40s although arrangements may vary in the different UK nations with England starting Phase 2 vaccinations for the 45-49 year age group but some parts of Wales appearing to include people in their early 40s.

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Our TSSA union and the other railway unions have been participating in the Vaccinations Working Group with the Rail Delivery Group. Subsequently, a Q&A about industry arrangements for staff was produced and agreed at the RICF and which members may find of use. It can be found at: <https://www.tssa.org.uk/en/help-legal-advice/coronavirus/index.cfm>

Should I be concerned about having a vaccination?

Whilst our union strongly supports mass vaccination as a way to protect both individuals and our wider society against the virus, we also recognise that some of you may have concerns about receiving it.

Amongst the concerns raised have been those in relation to the effect on pregnant and nursing mothers as well as for people who may suffer from allergies that could be affected by the contents of the vaccine. Our NHS has produced advice on these matters which can be found at: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/coronavirus-vaccine/> If you have concerns you may also wish to speak to their GPs.

Some people have also suggested religious and philosophical concerns about accepting a jab but we note that many such organisations have come out in support of the vaccination campaign.

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