

# World Turned Upside Down—But we will Continue in UNISON!

## COVID19 and Public Health — Not the end of the world but the end of business as usual?

There are medical and epidemiology experts who will have a far better idea of the likely trajectory of the COVID19 pandemic and the medium to long-term global risk it may pose to public health.

What is increasingly clear, is that our government’s strategy, that was focussed on maintaining profits ahead of protecting people, has utterly failed and the kind of restrictions that should have been enforced earlier are now being applied far too late and in a panicked manner.

We now face a situation where the illness is widespread in the UK and all but essential industries and services have had to be shut down to try and limit the further spread and inevitable impact of serious cases on our cash-starved NHS.

We can only do what we can, as citizens and public servants, to ensure that our most useful and essential services are maintained in the face of difficult circumstances. As a trades union, we will fight to protect the health and wellbeing of our members while we all do our best to meet our obligations as public servants.

We are not primary health workers but we can do our best to give those who are the best chance to tackle the consequences of this outbreak.

We can also help alleviate the very difficult economic impacts of the crisis on children and families and continue to support and care for our older adults and maintain public health and infrastructure.

That does not mean telling everyone to stay off, as we know many of our members are needed to continue providing vital services. It does mean reducing the exposure and risks to those who have to attend work to do their jobs and keeping the number of those exposed to that minimum number. We all need to keep on top of that battle.

It may be months or even years before things settle down to what may be called normal but COVID19 may be here to stay and that “normal” may be different to what has gone before. Stay safe in the meantime.

## We have a duty to keep ourselves, our families and our wider community safe

What can and should we generally do to stay safe:

- ◆ Everyone should maintain good hand and work-surface/ space hygiene and should practise social distancing as far as is practicable.
- ◆ Those who have symptoms and live alone should self-isolate for at least **7 days**. Those in a household where anyone has symptoms should all self-isolate for **14 days**.
- ◆ Those with **chronic medical conditions** that make them more susceptible to serious risk from COVID19 should **protect themselves and the resources of the health service by staying at home** (working, if and so far as they can).
- ◆ Those who can work effectively from home, or who are not required to attend work to provide (or support) key services, should stay at home. **The employer may, however, require people to attend work to assist in other duties that are essential.**
- ◆ Do not be afraid to **raise any concerns** over practices, arrangements or equipment shortages that are undermining the above protections.
- ◆ We should also be aware of wider health issues that come out of such crises. We may all be asked to be flexible but be careful that you are not being asked to do anything that is unsafe or that you are untrained for. Be aware of pressures to work longer or handle dangerously high workloads.
- ◆ This crisis does not effect your employer’s duty of care to you as employees—under the law—so be aware of your rights and their responsibilities:



<https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg163.pdf>



<https://www.unison.org.uk/coronavirus-rights-work/>

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# Branch Exec Agrees to Give a Helping Hand to Members

On hearing that many of our members out on the front line were being left without any means hand sanitising, your branch officers agreed to do what it could to try to bridge that gap.

We have continued to pursue the issue of proper provision of appropriate PPE and safe systems of working with the employers.

In the meantime, recognising that employers were essentially hamstrung by their own procurement protocols and shortages, partly caused by idiotic stockpil-



ing, we took the decision to source a bulk order of 70% alcohol hand gel and distribute it to our members and their colleagues on the front line.

We are awaiting delivery but hope to be able to distribute around 600 x 100ml bottles later this week.

This may be a small practical thing but we hope it will help.

## COVID19 Savings Put to Good Use

An odd side-effect of the COVID19 crisis is that it has led to the postponement of a great many meetings, conferences, training courses and other events that would have cost the branch hundreds of pounds over the coming months.

As a result, we had significant money available to put to good use. It was agreed to donate much of this to local foodbanks who we know will be struggling with the additional demand to help those people who will have been hammered financially by job losses on the back of COVID19.

We will be donating £150 each to ...

Dundee Foodbank in Stobswell, Taught by Muhammad and Lochee Community Larder.

## Advice for Our Community and Residential Care Workers

UNISON has released an extensive guide specifically aimed at all our Care Workers in both Community and Residential settings.

This includes advice a number of FAQs and further details on staying safe at work.



<https://www.unison.org.uk/care-workers-your-rights/coronavirus-advice-social-care-workers/#.XnXizSRnDNA.facebook>



UNISON is responding to the national coronavirus crisis by offering practical help to members experiencing financial hardship.

Staff at the union's dedicated charity, There for You, are seeking to reassure members that they are still offering a service to them.

And UNISON branches should divert all welfare support requests to There for You, so that there is one, consistent process at this time.

Find out more at:

<https://www.unison.org.uk/get-help/services-support/there-for-you/>

## Spare a Thought for Our KEY WORKERS

Ministers and supermarkets must work together to ensure key workers and the vulnerable get the food they need, says UNISON today (Friday).

The union says there must be co-ordinated measures to prioritise health staff and other public service workers who are unable to buy even the basics at the end of their shifts because of the widespread panic buying.

**UNISON general secretary Dave Prentis** said: "Sadly the time has come for ministers to take more decisive action to avoid key workers and vulnerable people being left without food after selfish and irresponsible stockpiling.

"Government calls for people not to hoard food and to consider others when shopping have fallen on deaf ears, leaving many to suffer.

"Supermarket shelves are stripped bare by the early morning. Shop staff are abused and the people putting themselves at risk to look after us are left with little or nothing.

"While some supermarkets must be praised for setting aside dedicated time for key workers and the elderly to shop, the initiative is patchy and doesn't take account of shift patterns. If people can't make the early morning window, they miss out on food.

"More must be done now. Ministers and the supermarkets must get a grip of this problem and shoppers need to change their behaviour to protect the people protecting us."

### UNISON: Always with you

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First name

Email address

\*We'll use your email to get in touch about your UNISON membership application

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