

Updated Covid-19 guidance for branches - 8 January 2021

This advice supplements UCU guidance for branches and members in higher, further, adult and prison education produced since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. Previous guidance on Covid-19 related risk assessments and control measures remain valid and can be found here [[UCU - UCU coronavirus advice](#)].

However, the more transmissible Covid-19 variant requires a revision of all previous covid-19 risk assessments and a tightening of control measures.

The situation is changing on an almost daily basis, and we expect new guidance from the UK government and devolved administrations in the coming days and weeks.

While guidance and expectations vary slightly across the devolved administrations, there are principles that are applicable in all circumstances and which are important to stress in the context of increased Covid related restrictions and public health regulations intended to restrict and reduce the spread of new variant corona virus.

The overriding principle must be that the numbers of staff attending onsite and in-person working should be kept to the absolute minimum necessary to fulfil essential work, with everyone who can work remotely from home being allowed to do so in accordance with public health requirements.

In the meantime, and in light of the new more transmissible variant of Covid-19 and the upsurge in infections, branches are advised to seek urgent consultations with employers on revised workplace risk assessments and control measures and to confirm implementation of the following safety measures for any workers undertaking essential onsite or in-person work:

- reduce the number of people required on site to the lowest level possible so that only essential and unavoidable work activities take place at this time
- reduce the number and duration of in person interactions to the lowest level possible.
- reduce the number of people permitted in a space at any one time to the lowest level possible
- set a safety threshold for ventilation of 12-17 litres per second per person for typical offices and educational settings. SAGE suggests employers adopt a precautionary approach and increase ventilation rates to reflect the increased risk of transmissibility of the new variant of COVID-19 which is potentially 50-70% higher
- ensure a minimum of 2m social distancing as standard

- ensure all essential workers undertaking in-person work have the highest possible level of respiratory protection. This should be FFP3 face masks (providing 99% particle filtration) where available and with priority for workers who could have interactions that fall below 2 metres social distancing and FFP2 face masks as a minimum standard for all (providing 94% particle filtration)
- ensure any use of face coverings in the workplace meets the WHO standard of three protective layers (Type IIR surgical masks)
- ensure effective cleaning and hygiene measures are in place
- ensure workers and students are given support to quarantine, self-isolate and undertake testing as required. Testing should not be used to reduce isolation periods for close contacts of infected people
- ensure access to regular testing for all who are not able to work or study remotely. Where lateral flow tests are used to identify asymptomatic cases, ensure a minimum of two negative tests prior to any attendance on site
- ensure lateral flow testing is undertaken by highly trained volunteers
- any workers at increased risk from COVID should not be required to undertake in-person work at this time and alternatives should be offered to ensure exposure risks are avoided or minimised
- ensure all workers and anyone they interact with during the working day receive adequate instruction, information, and training on any new safety measures that need to be followed.