

INTRODUCTION

UNISON is here for you. These are challenging times. You all carry out vital duties for the people of this country and deserve to get the right protection.

Whether you are working in a food business, visiting a food business, managing staff or working from home, UNISON thanks you for your commitment and public service.

We want all our members to be protected. We know that many of you who work in Field Operations have concerns about some Food Business Operators (FBO) or plants not implementing social distancing or providing the right protective equipment

Hopefully, you have been following our updates at www.facebook.com/unisonFSA and know that UNISON is actively negotiating and speaking with senior civil servants at the FSA to make sure you are all safe

SOCIAL DISTANCING IN PLANTS

We have been asking members to let us know of work-related problems affecting them and their families and have been able to help those who have been in touch.

But we can't help unless we know. So, we are keen to get your feedback on how the premises you work in are managing the requirements for social distancing during the current COVID-19 pandemic

We need more information on how social distancing or efforts to reduce person to person contact are implemented where you work and if you are worried about any premises. Inevitably there will be difficulties due to the working environments in plants, but that doesn't excuse FBOs from striving, wherever possible, to limit person to person contact. We know that every premise is different, but the principle is the same. The FBO must do everything within their power to help protect their staff and staff undertaking the delivery of official controls.

If you have concerns that all reasonable measures are not being taken by FBOs we want to know, but we need to know where and when.

Also, please let us know if you have any ideas on how things can be improved. People that work in the plants know better than anyone else.

What is the current advice on social distancing?

The [government advice](#) is to minimise social interaction outside our homes. This includes guidance to employers to enable staff to work from home wherever practicable.

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If not practicable, other measures should be considered. One of the most important of these is the two-metre rule: keeping two metres between colleagues and any other staff they may work with.

Why are two metres so important?

The most likely way of catching COVID-19 is when someone infected coughs and their droplets are passed to other people through their mouth, nose or eyes. By maintaining a distance of two metres, you minimise the risk of this happening. However, it is also essential you wash your hands thoroughly and regularly as droplets can be found on surfaces you touch.

The Welsh Government has put additional requirements in place making it clear that the two-metre social distancing rule applies to any workplace, including homes, where work and repairs are being undertaken, and outdoor spaces. All businesses must take all reasonable measures to ensure the two-metre rule is maintained between people on their premises whenever work is being carried out.

Are there any other measures that can help maintain social distancing?

Yes, the fewer face-to-face social interactions the better. Therefore, employers and staff should look to minimise face-to-face meetings or gatherings and using different ways of communicating such as telephone or video conferences.

Other measures could include minimising close contact with the public, such as limiting number of the public who are in a room/space at any given time and even erecting barriers (such as Perspex screens).

What about those most at risk, such as those with underlying health conditions?

Additional measures should be introduced. Advice and guidance can be found at our [main COVID 19 advice page](#).

What do I do if my employer is not doing enough to maintain social distancing?

Contact your rep (details below) who may be able to talk to and persuade the employer to adopt other measures. For example, following UNISON representation, refuse firms have reduced the number of people permitted in the cab of a refuse vehicle to two, allowing staff to maintain a safe social distance.

We will raise these issues with the FSA on your behalf. Therefore, if you want to raise anything with us, then contact your Convenor (if you can't get hold of them and it is urgent then you can try Paul Bell at p.bell@unison.co.uk.)

SPECIAL LEAVE

Members can ask their manager for special leave either because of their health or because they need to shield someone in the same household. UNISON has challenged employers where people have been denied it or where they've only been given nine days special leave. Remember there is no limit to special leave. If you are told otherwise, then contact your rep. We will raise every case with the FSA.

WORKING FROM HOME

Many of you are already working from home and this may be placing extra burdens on you, such as caring responsibilities and your mental health and wellbeing. Your employer is still responsible for your health and safety. They should ensure that you have the proper equipment for your job, that your workload is safe, and you are not put under unreasonable pressure.

Ask the FSA what support will be offered if you have a health and safety concern or need a reasonable adjustment if you are disabled. Make sure your manager has your up-to-date contact details, particularly if you are working from home or someone else's such as an elderly relative, or you are self-isolating at a partner's home.

You should know who to contact if you have IT concerns or data protection issues. Take care of yourself have regular breaks and switch off at the end of the day.

UNISON is proud of the public service you provide at this time of national crisis. So, don't get burned out. This is bad for your health and wellbeing and your employer.

MEMBERS WITH CARING RESPONSIBILITIES

If you cannot work because of caring responsibilities, e.g. if children are homeschooling or you are looking after elderly relatives, then you can take dependants or emergency leave. Statutory entitlement is unpaid for this leave, but many employers provide paid leave and may offer paid [parental or carer's leave](#). Check your workplace policies.

Ideally, employers should also follow Acas advice to consider more flexible homeworking arrangements such as working different hours, reducing hours or days worked, lowering work targets, and being flexible about deadlines where possible.

Managers should confirm whether there is any temporary or permanent change to your contractual obligations, as agreed with you.

UNISON CONVENOR CONTACT DETAILS

NAME	AREA	CONTACT DETAILS
Mark Haylett	National Convenor and East Midlands Convenor	07736 195559 / foodstandardsagency@unison.co.uk
Graham Cross	Cymru/Wales Convenor	07427 173716 / graham.cross@food.gov.uk
Wayne Parker	National Food Crime Convenor	07947 069208 / wparkerunison@gmail.com
John Rowland	South West Convenor	jr21unison@gmail.com
Alan Colson	South East Convenor	alancolson.unison@virginmedia.com
Chris Tozer	Easterner Convenor and Health & Safety	07951 049345 / chris.tozer@food.gov.uk
Alan Howarth	Yorkshire & Humberside Convenor	07980 569447 / ahowarth@unison-wakefield.org.uk
Richard Collier	Northern Convenor and office staff rep	07837 986486 / richard.collier@food.gov.uk
Martin Hope	North West Convenor	07446 068344 / martinhope67@hotmail.co.uk
John Price	Service Group Executive and Rep	07762 128138 / john.price@food.gov.uk
Christin Price	Rep and Cymru/Wales	caprice.unison@gmail.com
Darren Hough	West Midlands rep	darren.hough@food.gov.uk
Paul Bell	UNISON National Officer	020 7121 5708 / p.bell@unison.co.uk

WHAT UNISON WANTS TO HAPPEN IN PLANT

Our requirements/demands for stopping the spread of Covid-19 and protecting members:

- Adequate separation to be maintained at all stages from entry to exit of the FBO premises
- Proper separation to be maintained on the line, which may mean slowing it down
- Two MHIs and OVs should not stand or work next to each other. Everyone should be at least two metres apart. No one should work above someone else on the line for obvious reasons

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- No sharing of washing/sterilising facilities in food processing areas
- Adequate time and space for washing down after the shift ends and at break times
- Any queuing and eating at canteens should maintain social distancing. Staff need to be able to abide by the two-metre separation at lunch and breaks
- Provision of hand sanitiser by the FSA for employees, mainly where there are limited washing facilities
- A strict monitored and enforced protocol to be provided to each MHI and OV in consultation with the local UNISON rep. Every FBO is different. If the FSA cannot guarantee this, then the plant needs to close.

USEFUL LINKS

Health & Safety Executive:

https://www.hse.gov.uk/news/coronavirus.htm?utm_source=hse.gov.uk&utm_medium=refferal&utm_campaign=coronavirus&utm_content=home-page-banner

UNISON Welfare:

Members experiencing financial and emotional difficulties can contact our welfare charity, There for You, which provides confidential advice and support service for members and their dependents.

You can contact UNISON Welfare here <https://www.unison.org.uk/get-help/services-support/there-for-you/>.

PPE Advice:

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

UNISON FSA Member Facebook Page – for the latest information:

www.facebook.com/unisonfsa

UNISON National Website:

www.unison.org.uk

Paul Bell
UNISON National Officer
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