

No: 252/20

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## TO: ALL BRANCHES

Dear Colleague

### **Coronavirus - Government announcement on easing lockdown measures**

The purpose of this LTB is to update branches on the Government's announcement and statements this week, on easing the current lockdown measures in England to deal with coronavirus.

Whilst many CWU members will not be directly affected by the changes in relation to the re-opening of workplaces, we do have members who will be and we will all be impacted by the easing of lockdown measures more generally. The union has therefore been engaging with the Government independently and through the TUC over the past two months.

The Prime Minister has set out a number of steps on easing the lockdown for England including encouraging the re-opening of workplaces that have shut – notably in manufacturing and construction – where it is not possible for staff to work from home; removing the limit on exercising outside only once a day from Wednesday, while continuing social distancing requirements; and looking ahead, the possible re-opening of primary schools, starting with certain year groups in June, and the possible re-opening of the hospitality industry in July. A summary of the measures is attached to this LTB.

Alongside this, the Government has published more detailed guidance about safe-working in certain types of workplaces including offices and contact centres, other people's homes and shops and branches. Along with the TUC, the CWU has been engaging with the Government on its workplace proposals and this guidance over the past two months. Working with other unions we have been pushing the Government to put the health and safety of workers first with regard to any easing of the lockdown and to clearly set out the steps employers need to take in order to ensure workplaces are safe. We have also made a number of proposals in relation to working practices in our own industries and taken part in a Government consultation to set out the union's views.

We do not believe the Government has managed the latest announcements well, particularly by failing to publish its guidance on specific workplaces until last night and having been unclear initially about when it hoped workplaces that had been closed would open from – it has now clarified it is encouraging re-opening from Wednesday. We are also concerned that there is no UK-wide approach to social distancing, that the public messaging is not sufficiently clear and in several areas the proposals we made in relation to particular types of workplaces have not been included in the final guidance.

For members who are affected by changes as a result of the announcements on workplaces this week, it is important to be clear that employers are under legal obligations to protect workers from risks to their health and safety, to carry out risk-assessments and to consult union health and safety representatives. Importantly, employees have individual rights not to work in a workplace where they reasonably believe it would be unsafe to do so. The guidance the Government has published sets out more detailed workplace-specific standards in relation to coronavirus on issues such as maintaining 2 metre distancing and cleaning surfaces, and where any employer is re-opening their business or changing working practices in response to the Government's announcement, it is important that branches contact the relevant industrial department for advice.

Similarly, where changes are being made by employers and there are questions in relation to those in vulnerable groups who have been told to self-isolate, individuals who have childcare issues or face difficulties getting to work because of public transport, branches should contact the relevant industrial department.

Finally, alongside the TUC, the union will be continuing to push the Government on both immediate steps taken in response to the crisis – including statutory sick pay, benefits levels, the furlough scheme and support for parents – and the need to ensure working people do not suffer as a result of a long-term economic crisis. The NEC will be discussing these issues later this week and we will be saying more on the union's demands and how we will be campaigning on this as part of our ongoing work on the new deal for workers.

Any queries on the contents of this LTB should be directed to [gsoffice@cwu.org](mailto:gsoffice@cwu.org) or the appropriate industrial department.

Yours sincerely



Dave Ward  
**General Secretary**

## **Our Plan to Rebuild: The UK Government's COVID-19 Recovery Strategy**

### **Overview**

The Government has outlined its plan for the next stages of its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The majority of these measures are only applicable to England with devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland soon to publish their own plans. The advice of the devolved administrations remains to stay at home. The Government has outlined a rough timeline for the easing out of lockdown measures, beginning on Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> May 2020.

### **Moving to the Next Phase**

The UK Government has outlined five tests that inform any easing of the current lockdown measures:

- 1) Protect the NHS's ability to cope; we must be confident that we are able to provide sufficient critical care and specialist treatment.
- 2) See a sustained and consistent fall in the daily death rates
- 3) Have reliable data that the rate of infection (R) is decreasing to manageable levels across the board
- 4) Be confident that the range operational challenges (such as testing capacity and PPE) are under control and able to meet demand.
- 5) Be confident that any adjustments will not lead to a second peak of infections.

The Government's aim has been to save lives which "continues to be the overriding priority at the heart of this plan". The plan elaborates that the Government wishes to:

*"return life to as close to normal as possible, for as many people as possible, as fast and fairly as possible... in a way that avoids a new epidemic, minimises lives lost and maximises health, economic and social outcomes."*

### **First Consideration: Health Outcomes**

- The government stresses that overall health outcomes, such as those not related to COVID-19 must also be taken into consideration. For example, postponement of important medical care and public health interventions.

### **Second Consideration: Economic Outcomes**

- The plan highlights that "a strong economy is the best way to protect people's jobs and ensure that the Government can fund the country's vital public services."
- A number of factors are considered such as
  - ➔ Sustainability of public finances
  - ➔ Overall financial stability
  - ➔ Distributional effects of measures

### **Third Consideration: Social Outcomes**

- This includes the number of days of education lost and the fairness of any actions undertaken.

### **The Plan for a Phased Recovery**

There are plans for two further phases of the UK recovery beyond the current lockdown measures (phase one). Phase two is "smarter controls" and phase three is "reliable treatment".

Importantly, however, each of these phases contains **different steps within which specific lockdown measures will be lifted and/or eased and sectors of the economy will reopen.**

The Government has provided an indicative timeline and roadmap for these steps which is outlined below. The plan states that any “changes will be announced at least 48 hours before coming into effect.”

### Step One

These changes will come into place from **Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> May** in England. The advice for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland remains to stay at home.

- Sectors of the economy that are permitted to be open and should be open include: food production, construction, manufacturing, logistics, distribution and scientific research in laboratories. Hospitality and non-food retail are to remain closed throughout the first step.
- These sectors will be aided by the Government’s COVID-19 Secure Workplaces guidelines.
- Schools will remain closed but the plan urges vulnerable children or the children of critical workers to attend school. Paid childcare can now take place subject to meeting public health guidelines.
- Public transport is still to be avoided wherever possible (even for key workers).
- Homemade cloth face coverings can help to reduce the transmission of the virus and should be worn in enclosed spaces where social distancing is not always possible.
- People can exercise outside as much as they desire. They can also meet up with one person from outside of their household as long as social distancing is adhered to. People may also drive to outdoor open spaces within England.
- The clinically vulnerable need to avoid as much contact as possible but do not need to be shielded. The clinically extremely vulnerable are to remain home.
- “The Government will require all international arrivals to self-isolate in their accommodation for fourteen days on arrival”, this excludes however the common travel area. These measures will not be in place on May 13<sup>th</sup> but are to begin as soon as possible.

### Step Two

The second step will be made no earlier than **1<sup>st</sup> June** and will include:

- A phased return for early years settings and schools. Priorities will be given to Year 6, 10, 12 and the youngest children. The Government is aiming for all primary children to return before summer if possible.
- Opening non-essential retail and permitting cultural and sporting events to take place behind closed doors.

### Step Three

The third step will be made no earlier than **4<sup>th</sup> July** and will include:

- Open remaining businesses such as personal care, hospitality, public places and leisure facilities.

### Accompanying Government Work

The Government has outlined 14 programmes of work which will assist with the UK response. These include: secure NHS and care capacity; protecting care homes; smarter shielding for the most vulnerable; more effective, risk-based targeting of protection measures; accurate disease monitoring; testing and tracing; increased scientific understanding; COVID secure workplaces; better distancing measures; economic and social support to maintain livelihoods; treatments and vaccines; international awareness and action; public communication, understanding and enforcement; and sustainable government structures.