

No. 298/2020

12<sup>th</sup> June 2020

**TO: ALL BRANCHES WITH ROYAL MAIL GROUP MEMBERS**

Dear Colleagues,

**Re: Coronavirus COVID-19 – Supporting Members Returning to Work.**

Over the last couple of weeks we have been engaging with Royal Mail to ensure any members returning to work from absence due to Coronavirus COVID-19 are given maximum support and any concerns are dealt with prior to returning to work including ensuring you understand what the environment currently looks like, what support you can expect and ensure your needs and concerns are taken into account.

This LTB and attachments explains the process we have agreed with Royal Mail, which should be followed, however not all stages may be required. It covers all Royal Mail Group employees, including Parcelforce and RMPFS. Quadrant will be covered by Compass Group Policy.

Members will be in different categories.

- Extremely clinically vulnerable – advised to shield
- Carers of extremely clinically vulnerable – have an NHS letter of the person they are shielding
- Clinically vulnerable – Over 70s, pregnant employees, or those with an underlying health condition
- Carers of clinically vulnerable – stringently social distancing
- Non-clinically vulnerable – e.g. employees at risk of domestic abuse

## **Members who are Extremely Vulnerable and Carers of Extremely Vulnerable**

Members who have received the letter from the Government / NHS will continue to shield in line with the Government advice. Currently these dates are:-

- Wales 16<sup>th</sup> August
- Scotland 31<sup>st</sup> July
- England & Northern Ireland 30<sup>th</sup> June

- **PLEASE NOTE THESE DATES MAY CHANGE.**

Members in the extremely vulnerable category will continue shielding until the dates above, unless Government advice changes or members receive updated advice themselves.

## **Members who are in all other Categories**

It is understandable members may be fearful about returning to work and ensuring they keep themselves and their loved ones safe. Members should always follow Government / NHS advice. Whilst there is indication the Governments in England and Northern Ireland may extend the period of shielding, at the time of writing there has been no announcement.

We have agreed the following process with Royal Mail to support members returning to work. The process is a 4 step process to ensure all members' concerns are taken into account and any adjustments required for you as an individual can be put in place for your safe return to the workplace. The process is a 4 step process, however, not all of the steps will be applicable to everyone. This process should be carried out with the full involvement of the appropriate CWU Representatives.

### **Step 1**

Members will be contacted by their line manager to discuss their current circumstances and have a discussion about a return to work.

The discussion will be non-threatening, looking to support you and will include, however not be limited to:-

- Ensuring you know of any social distancing measures which have been put in place and how they will be maintained.
- Allow you to visit the office prior to returning where requested.
- Ensure input from Occupational Health in any medical decision to return to work.
- How members travel to and from work safely.
- Ensure planned adjustments are in place prior to you returning to the workplace.
- Agree to working different hours of attendance where requested.
- Ensure any other concerns are raised and taken into account.

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CWU 150 The Broadway, Wimbledon, London, SW19 1RX  
email: info@cwu.org Tel: 020 8971 7200 Fax: 020 8971 7300  
General Secretary: Dave Ward

 @DaveWardGS  Dave Ward CWU

The form managers will use for this conversation is attached at **Appendix A**.

Members who experience any difficulty with these conversations should contact their CWU representative.

## **Step 2**

From the conversation in Step 1, a date should be arranged to have a further discussion around returning to work including what adjustments will need to be put in place. This can be to work from home where applicable.

Members should be offered a visit to their office so they can understand the measures which are in place to support their return to work.

This discussion should include any medical information and a referral to Occupational Health if appropriate.

## **Step 3**

If required, this step should start to formulate what the return to work will look like. This will include any further discussion about medical information, including Occupational Health / GP advice.

## **Step 4**

This conversation should be finalising a return to work, including the date or identify reasons why this cannot happen.

If agreed adjustments are not yet put in place, members will not be forced to return to work and will remain away from the workplace until the adjustments have been completed.

If followed correctly, the process above should ensure a safe return to work, with full involvement of CWU members and their representatives, ensuring concerns have been taken into account and any required adjustments made.

We encourage branches to ensure this LTB is given the widest possible circulation to all members.

All enquiries regarding the content of this LTB should be addressed to the **PTCS** Department, quoting reference 420. Email address: **khay@cwu.org**

Yours Sincerely,



Carl Maden  
**Assistant Secretary (Acting)**

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## Return to work process: Phase 1 – Prompt sheet for initial phone call with employees who are shielding or self-isolating due to coronavirus (COVID-19)

This prompt sheet is for managers to use to start discussion with employees who are shielding or self-isolating due to coronavirus and where appropriate, to set up a meeting to discuss their potential return to work. It is intended to be used with employees who fall into any of the vulnerable groups, as identified in the Government guidance:

- **Extremely clinically vulnerable** – advised to shield
- **Clinically vulnerable** – over 70s, pregnant employees, or those with an underlying health condition
- **Carers of extremely clinically vulnerable** – have an NHS letter of the person they are shielding
- **Carers of clinically vulnerable** – stringently social distancing
- **Non-clinically vulnerable** – employees at risk of domestic abuse at home

Employee name:	Pay number:
Absence start date:	Absence end date:
Reason for absence:	

The purpose of the call is to check in with the employee and understand if there are any changes in circumstances following updated Government/NHS guidance to vulnerable groups and if appropriate, start to discuss returning to work.

The discussion is informal and is recommended to take place before any required meeting to discuss an employee's potential return to work following shielding or self-isolation due to coronavirus.

Please record discussion points and agreed actions.

<p><b>1. How have you been feeling and coping with shielding/self-isolation?</b></p> <p><i>[Prompt: Review their original NHS letter/communication or most recent fit note to check if the advice was to shield or self-isolate (for themselves or someone in their household.)]</i></p>
<p><b>2. As you may be aware, the Government has recently updated its guidance for vulnerable groups of people who were advised either to shield or self-isolate. I am therefore giving you a call to see how you are and to start to talk about the impact of these changes and how this may lead to your potential return to work</b></p> <p><b>Have you received any updated communication and/or medical evidence such as another NHS letter or fit note regarding your period of shielding/self-isolation?</b></p> <p><i>[Prompt: Government advice is for people to shield (shielding) until <b>30 June 2020 (31 July in Scotland, 16 August 2020 in Wales)</b>, when another Government update is expected. Other vulnerable groups, e.g. over 70s (self-isolating/social distancing) are able to return to work:</i></p>

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## Return to work process: Phase 1 – Prompt sheet for initial phone call with employees who are shielding or self-isolating due to coronavirus (COVID-19)

- *If they are shielding and haven't had any updated advice, they should continue shielding. They will, however, need to provide an updated NHS letter when their previous end of shielding date comes to an end or Government advice changes.*
- *For those self-isolating – if the date has run out on their current fit note, ask for further medical evidence and continue to ask the return to work questions from 6.]*

### **3. [If yes] Has the advice changed from the original medical evidence you provided?**

*[Prompt: As noted in 2., if they are shielding and haven't had any updated advice, they should continue shielding. There will be no need to ask the return to work related questions 6-10. or set up a meeting with the employee at this stage.]*

### **4. Do you feel you have been able to look after your physical and mental wellbeing?**

*[Prompt: Reminder of health and wellbeing support available such as Feeling First Class]*

### **5. Have you been able to keep up to date with the company communications, for example on the myroyalmail app?**

*[Prompt: Provide an update on the office – any news from colleagues, or the office]*

**There have been daily updates on how the RMG has been dealing with the impact of coronavirus. For example, there has been a huge amount of work done on putting in place measures to protect our employees and customers. In our office we have.....**

*[Prompt: Talk through the key health and safety measures put in place in your office and how they are working in practice. You may find the office SHE COVID-19 risk assessment useful]*

## Return to work process: Phase 1 – Prompt sheet for initial phone call with employees who are shielding or self-isolating due to coronavirus (COVID-19)

The following questions only need to be asked if shielding/self-isolating is not continuing for the employee.

### 6. Do you have any specific concerns about potentially returning to work?

*[Prompt: If you have suggestions, talk through with the employee, e.g. if they are concerned about the commute to work, start to explore working different start times. Give examples of what other employees are doing to socially distance at work, e.g. staggered entry/exit times]*

### 7. What is causing you most concern?

*[Prompt: This could be related to the commute to work on public transport, not being able to socially distance at work.]*

### 8. Is there anything you can suggest I/RMG can do to help address these concerns?

*[Prompt: Start to think about whether they could start/finish at a different time due to avoid peak travel, carry out alternative duties any further adjustments that could be made in the office.]*

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**9. Based on our conversation today, when do you consider you will be able to return to work?**

*[Prompt: If they are reluctant to return to work, advise them to take a bit of time to reflect on what has been covered in the initial conversations and you can discuss further when you have the meeting.]*

*[Prompt: The following meeting may not be required if the employee is able to return to work with the current protective measures in place].*

**10. I would like to set up a meeting to discuss the potential options available regarding your return to work and what support can be put in place.**

**Would you be willing to come into the office for the meeting as I would be able to show you the changes we have implemented to our current ways of working and how the safety health and wellbeing of all employees and customers is at the forefront of everything we are currently doing, while managing our operation.**

*[Prompt: This enables the familiarisation and onboarding element – so encourage face-to-face with social distancing, as employees will be able to see the safety measures and changed working practices within the office. This may help address concerns they have. If the face-to-face review meeting is declined, you can set up a further call to discuss potential options of return to work. Do not force face-to-face].*

**11. Is there anything else you would like to cover today?**

## Return to work process: Phase 1 – Prompt sheet for initial phone call with employees who are shielding or self-isolating due to coronavirus (COVID-19)

Many thanks for your time today.

*[If they are continuing to shield]* As the current advice is for you to continue shielding, we do not have to have a meeting about your potential return to work at this stage. Please continue to stay at home and keep me updated with any further advice you get. I will continue to contact you weekly as part of our agreed contact.

*[If they are not shielding and are able to return to work]* I look forward to you returning to work on [DATE]. On your first day I will hold a welcome back meeting with you.

*[If they are not shielding and can potentially return to work]* I will send out the meeting invite today. If you would like to be accompanied by a union rep or colleague at the meeting, please consider contacting them now.

I am looking forward to welcoming you back to work and will do all I can to support this.

If you have any questions in the meantime, just give me a call or drop me an email.

*[Prompt: Signpost [www.myroyalmail.com/Coronavirus](http://www.myroyalmail.com/Coronavirus) for the latest advice and guidance]*

### After the call:

Additional comments/notes/actions from the manager:

# Return to work review discussion for employees who are shielding or self-isolating due to coronavirus

Version: 9 June 2020

Employee name:

Pay number:

Absence start date:

Absence end date:

Reason for absence:

**A tool to help managers when welcoming back people to work following a period of non-attendance due to coronavirus related shielding or self-isolation.**

*The discussion should be conducted in privacy in an open and supportive way. The discussion is informal and is recommended to take place before any agreed return to work date. Invite the team member into work for the discussion when the office is quieter to discuss returning to work in advance of any agreed return to work date. **Request the employee brings up to date medical information with them which may be an NHS letter, GP Fit Note or letter or other medical information. Some employees will no longer have/need a medical note.***

*A telephone conversation with the employee would be appropriate if a face to face meeting is not possible and up to date medical information should be provided by post, email or text.*

*It is very important that this supportive discussion takes place and that both the manager and employee discuss the shielding/self-isolation absence and the employee's overall wellbeing.*

*Employees will not be required to disclose information of a personal or sensitive nature if they choose not to do so.*

Please record discussion points and agreed actions.

**Welcome the team member to the meeting and explain purpose of the discussion:**

- Check they are feeling OK and how they feel about potentially returning to work after a long absence.
- Discuss the reason for the absence, which will either be coronavirus related shielding or self-isolation.
- Provide an opportunity for the employee to raise any concerns they may have.
- Establish whether they need any additional support.
- Update them on what has happened whilst they have been away.
- Ensure that current medical information or certificate/s covers their whole absence.

## **Introduction:**

As I mentioned on our call, the purpose of this meeting is to discuss any updated medical guidance you have received and your potential return to work. It is also to give you the opportunity to ask any questions or raise any issues with me.

During our meeting, I will be completing a COVID-19 return to work review. This is to help me review your personal situation to put in place the appropriate level of support to aid your return to work.

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# Return to work review discussion for employees who are shielding or self-isolating due to coronavirus

Version: 9 June 2020

It may be necessary for me to refer you to Occupational Health, but if this is the case, I will ask for your permission. Do you have any initial concerns or questions about this?

*[PROMPT: Outline any previous discussions or communication with the employee and what was covered]*

**1. Can you outline how you have been over the last few weeks? Have you been fully shielding or self-isolating for yourself or for other reasons?**

*PROMPT: Needing to shield or self-isolate in a pandemic is unprecedented and people will have had different experiences and reactions to it.*

**2. We have worked hard to maintain the protective measures put in place in the workplace, such as temporary changes to our operational processes, social distancing, hand washing, staggered start times, provision of protective equipment (PE) etc. To reiterate, in our office...**

*PROMPT: Reiterate the preventative measures established within the unit that you covered in the initial call and any new measures or changes to working practices. Refer to the one-page summary listing preventative measures. Talk through in more detail than you did on the initial call, the health and safety measures put in place in your office and how they are working in practice.*

**3. How are you feeling about returning to work following your shielding/self-isolating absence due to coronavirus guidance?**

*PROMPT: Acknowledge that the current pandemic is very stressful, and people cope in different ways. The team member may have been directly affected through family or friends contracting the virus or lost someone to the virus. Being at home for several weeks may have impacted on mental or physical wellbeing and they may be nervous about returning to work.*

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# Return to work review discussion for employees who are shielding or self-isolating due to coronavirus

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4. To support this discussion, can you share with me up to date medical information e.g. NHS letter, Fit Note, other medical information, if relevant.

*PROMPT: Some employees will no longer have/need a medical note. Be mindful of the employee's right to maintain their medical information as confidential. If on medication, discuss any known side effects to ensure ability to perform job safely.*

*Is a referral to occupational health required to review and support understanding of the team members health status and return to work timeline? Yes/No*

5. Discuss any key changes that may have taken place during the absence.

*PROMPT: Briefings, revised operations methods or work area changes e.g. one person per van, no need for PDA to be signed by the customer. Record brief details including obtaining signature for colleague brief sessions.*

6. Remind and share support available.

*PROMPT: Are you aware of the services of First-Class Support (0800 6888777)? Offer details, emphasis this is a confidential service available 24/7 and no information shared to the business. Note employee response. Share one-page support summary and signpost [www.myroyalmail.com/Coronavirus](http://www.myroyalmail.com/Coronavirus) for the latest advice and guidance.*

7. Let's agree next steps and your return to work date (if appropriate)

*PROMPT: Discuss how they would travel to work, any concerns and agree next steps, which may include flexibility, an agreed start date to return to work, job modifications and/or changes to hours via a phased return. Arrange a follow-up telephone call and/or another agreed review date as required. If a follow-up meeting is agreed, note the areas to be covered at that meeting and whether it is face to face or by telephone. Consider:*

- *What can you change to help overcome the difficulties?*
- *Are there any temporary or permanent adjustments that could potentially be made to the working environment which may help, e.g. hours of work, the employee's duties and or role?*
- *If there are any modifications or phased return to work options that are considered appropriate during the first week or so. Agree these and write them up with an expected conclusion date.*

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Version: 9 June 2020

**NOTE:** For Disability related /Pregnancy Related Absences and short-term job modifications.  
**PROMPT:** Review any existing Risk Assessment for changes or ensure a Disability or New and Expectant Mothers Risk Assessment has been carried out and specify progress review arrangements including dates of weekly review meetings.

After our meeting, I will finalise and complete the COVID-19 return to work review and form. I will contact you in due course to update you on the outcome and next steps. I will share this review document with you once completed to reflect any agreed plan/commitments.

Many thanks for your time today. I am looking forward to welcoming you back to work and will do all I can to support your return.

If you have any questions in the meantime, just give me a call or drop me an email.

**Confirmation that this supportive discussion covering the above points has taken place:**

Employee's signature:

Date:

Manager's signature:

Date:

Print Name (Manager's):

Date:

*This form should be retained locally and in confidence.*