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To: All Branches

Dear Colleagues,

RMG/CWU Joint Statement Dealing with Coronavirus/Covid-19 - Protecting and Putting Employees First and Introduction of Mandatory Face Masks

Discussions with Royal Mail Group on the subject of Covid-19 protection for the workforce and the deployment of face coverings/face masks has been subject to discussion with CWU/HQ over recent weeks. On Friday 30 October the Union was informed of the employer's intention to change their policy from 'Strongly Recommended' to 'Mandatory'. Proposals were then put to the Union, regarding the company's intention to move to 'Mandatory' face covering/face masks for all staff from Monday 9 November with RMG requesting CWU support.

As the Coronavirus/Covid-19 transmissions and infection rate continues to rise, the country is also entering the flu season. At the same time 33,000 temporary, casual and agency workers are being taken on by the company to support Christmas peak workload. These additional workers will increase the risk of infection, if adequate controls are not in place and maintained. It is therefore now mandatory to wear a face covering in all Royal Mail Group indoor workplaces.

The company also supports and encourages the wearing of face coverings whilst outdoors in order to keep employee safe when engaging customers but it is not mandatory outdoors.

However, it is crucially important to recognise that Royal Mail Group and the CWU agree that face coverings do not replace other preventative measures such as increased hand hygiene, social distancing and increased cleaning; THESE MUST REMAIN IN PLACE.

Wearing a face covering can help workers stay safe by reducing the risk of infection. This is even more important in situations where social distancing is difficult, with the onset of the flu season and where employees meet new people, such as Christmas temporary workers over the Christmas peak in crowded workplaces. The key benefits of face masks/face coverings in the workplace is to prevent the spread of the viral infection and defend the workforce from being a pandemic victim of what is an airborne illness, protecting both the wearer and the surrounding people – giving risk reduction from droplet transmission during exhalation.

The introduction of mandatory face coverings in all indoor workplaces enhances existing preventative, risk control measures to protect the workforce from Coronavirus/Covid-19. This forms part of the RMG Coronavirus Risk Assessment, which is required under health and safety legislation.

CWU/HQ is supporting the initiative having considered the current and worsening Coronavirus/Covid-19 situation across the UK along with expert scientific and medical advice and recommendations. SAGE, the Scientific Group for Emergencies who provides scientific and technical advice to government decision makers during emergencies concluded that the public and workers should be advised to wear face coverings. At the end of September the chief medical officers for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland changed the view and recommended all four nations upgrade their coronavirus alert levels following the exponential rise in cases and in a powerful joint statement said that "If we are to avoid significant excess deaths and exceptional pressure in the NHS and other health services over the autumn and winter months, everyone has to follow the social distancing guidance, wear face coverings correctly, wash their hands regularly and improve cleaning."

Mandating of face coverings is a view shared by regulatory bodies such as the Health and Safety Executive and many local authorities. A number of Royal Mail offices (mail centres and delivery offices) have already introduced the wearing face coverings indoors, following outbreaks which made workers there realise the risk and uptake has been good.

The agreed Joint Statement covers off the important issue of the company's approach to compliance, agreeing a compliance process and a robust exceptions process as well as CWU involvement at all levels. The CWU is supporting this decision, subject to ongoing discussions and regular joint reviews, for a number of very important reasons:

- The Virus infection rate continues to rise. 33,500 new cases were reported yesterday with nearly 600 deaths.
- The high daily number of new cases being recorded has been running at 20,000 to 25,000 a day for the last month.
- Hospital admissions are increasing.
- A 125% increase in workplace outbreaks, reported by the TUC.
- 33,000 Christmas casuals/agency workers about to join the RM/PFWW workforce.
- Local and regional restrictions being imposed across large parts of the country.
- A second national lockdown in England is now in place with similar restrictions in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- The risk of a flu epidemic alongside the virus pandemic.
- The number of weekly Coronavirus deaths is at its highest since June.
- The number of patients admitted to hospital has jumped by more than 60 per cent in 10 days.
- Hospital patients needing a ventilator has also increased by 50 per cent.
- Following several Coronavirus/Covid-19 outbreaks/case clusters in Royal Mail and Parcelforce offices, Public Health Authorities, the HSE and local councils have recommended that Royal Mail and Parcelforce should introduce the 'Mandatory' wearing of face coverings/face masks in indoor workplaces.
- A third of UK workers are worried about catching Coronavirus in their workplace.

It is fully agreed that the introduction of the new 'Mandatory Masks/Face Coverings' measure is not an end in itself and does not replace other preventative, risk control measures. It must be seen as one of the steps to safer working and a 'Covid-19 Secure Workplace'.

Mandatory masks is one important component to a 'five-pronged', fully committed drive that's now needed with both RMG and CWU in agreement. These are:

- Improving Hygiene.
- Mandatory Face Coverings.
- Social Distancing (2M).
- Improved Cleaning (premises and vehicles).

- 'Workforce Testing' (The CWU has also requested the introduction of regular workforce testing which Royal Mail Group have accepted and are in talks with the DHSC on this matter.

RMG and CWU are in full agreement that 'Mandatory' face masks/coverings are not a substitute for social distancing (2M), increased/improved cleaning and improved hygiene standards.

The CWU Health, Safety & Environment Department is keen to get a workplace weekly testing regime implemented and have formally put forward a proposal to Royal Mail Group to consider the introduction of regular workplace Covid-19 testing which we strongly believe would improve safety, reduce transmissions and the infection rate plus give a huge reassurance to the workforce at this tough time.

A number of important associated issues have been raised by the Union in order to secure our support and commitment to the 'Mandatory Masks/Face Covering' initiative and these have been included in the Joint Statement. These are in summary:

- Safety will be the No1 priority.
- Masks per person not to be limited and supplies to be sufficient to enable them to be changed frequently.
- Masks to not be compulsory whilst working outside.
- Visors to be provided to supplement the face masks/coverings if employees request them.
- CWU ASRs to be fully involved in the process with managers and the SHE Team to work together spot-checking/inspecting social distancing and Covid-Secure compliance.
- A 'supportive', non-punitive, mask wearing compliance process in line with the RMG/CWU PPE National Agreement 3-step process.
- A robust 'exceptions process' - this includes (but is not limited to) staff with underlying medical, physical or mental health conditions. Where this is the case, members will inform their manager that they are unable to wear a face covering and their manager will accept it. Management will not refuse to accept exemption for these workers and managers will not request that individuals provide evidence to prove that they are exempt. Exempt workers may wear an exemption card or badge if they so wish but it is not mandatory. Exempt workers do not need to request a letter from a medical professional about the reason for being exempt from wearing a face covering.
- Employees may remove face coverings when seated to eat or drink in staff mess rooms, rest rooms, restaurants or cafes.
- Arrangements will be put in place for those members who rely on lip reading, clear sound or facial expressions to communicate.
- In line with the RMG Five-Year Mental Health Strategy, RMG will, with the full support and involvement of the CWU, support and assist those members in distress with mental health problems. Mental wellbeing will continue to be promoted to minimise the risk of widespread and long-term problems as a result of the pandemic.

Workplace Intense Cleaning Following Cases of Covid-19 Positive Tests

It is confirmed that following the diagnosis of positive cases in Royal Mail Group workplaces, intense virucidal, antimicrobial cleaning will take place of both the workplace and vehicles.

Reducing the Risk of Covid-19 Coronavirus Transmission in the Workplace

RMG and the CWU recognise that the introduction of the mandatory use of face coverings in indoor settings is part of a package of government control measures to reduce the risk of Coronavirus transmission and must not be treated in isolation as a 'catch-all' solution. RMG therefore is fully committed to the need to:

- Maintaining social distancing of 2m.
- Promoting increased hygiene standards, frequency of hand washing, hand sanitising and the use of disinfectant wipes.
- Increase cleaning standards in workplaces, toilets, washrooms, changing rooms, restrooms etc., and vehicles plus surface cleaning, including disinfecting frequent touch points.
- Keeping the activity time involved as short as possible.
- Using screens or barriers to separate people from each other.
- Reducing the number of people each person has contact with.
- Following government and HSE guidance.
- Making it understood that face coverings alone are no substitute for all of these above measures.
- Visors can be worn and will be provided on request (to be worn in conjunction with a face covering).
- Face coverings will not be compulsory whilst working outside.

Exemptions

To reiterate the important point made above; RMG recognise that some people are unable to wear face coverings for various reasons. A robust 'exceptions process' is now in place. This includes (but is not limited to) staff with underlying medical, physical or mental health conditions. Where this is the case, members will inform their manager that they are unable to wear a face covering and the manager will accept it. Management will not refuse to accept exemption for these workers and managers will not request that individual provide evidence to prove that they are exempt. Exempt workers may wear an exemption card or badge if they so wish but it is not mandatory. Exempt workers do not need to request a letter from a medical professional about the reason for being exempt from wearing a face covering.

Video Update

There is a video update from Dr. Shaun Davis, Royal Mail Group Global Director Compliance & Sustainability and Dave Joyce, CWU National Health, Safety & Environment Officer available to view on the following links –please bring this to the attention of members:

<https://royalmailcommunications.newsweaver.com/ldi3fqlw6h/1dn3qmvrypt19wxbbjs1na/external?email=true&a=5&p=5855414&t=2325166>

<https://royalmailcommunications.newsweaver.com/ldi3fqlw6h/kk2qcc2g20919wxbbjs1na?email=true&lang=en&a=5&p=5855414&t=2325166&autoplay=VIMEO-475969938>

CWU Representatives Involvement

RMG will encourage everyone to support this policy. CWU Representatives will be fully involved at all times with their input taken into account. There will be strong local CWU involvement and employee engagement to ensure better understanding of the policy and the reasons for the 'Covid-Secure' risk control measures. Managers and CWU representatives will work together to ensure that this policy is deployed in a supportive manner, providing encouragement, assistance and help – not a punitive approach. SHE Business Partners and CWU ASRs will be fully involved, consulted and available to advise and support unit managers with any queries about the Covid-Secure controls and compliance with them.

Attachments:

- Joint Statement
- PPE 3-Step Compliance Process
- Mandatory Face Coverings poster

- Mandatory Face Coverings and Masks - Frequently Asked Questions and Answers Version 2 (This will continue to be updated)
- Guidance for managers on mandatory face coverings in indoor workplaces
- Colleague Update on mandatory wearing of face coverings in indoor workplaces

Yours sincerely



Dave Joyce
National Health, Safety & Environment Officer