

Royal Mail Group, CWU and Unite/CMA Communication on the Protection of Employees During the Coronavirus Pandemic Through Mandatory Face Coverings in Indoor Workplaces

RMG, CWU and Unite/CMA three-way joint working to continue to reduce the risk of Coronavirus

With the new more infectious virus strains, spreading across the UK, we must work together to ensure that we are all doing everything we can to reduce infection risks through suitable control measures which have been identified through the Covid-19 risk assessment process. Together, Royal Mail Group, CWU and Unite/CMA continue to work together to support the workforce and the business through the pandemic. As a reminder, please see the [Joint Statement](#) which RMG issued together with CWU in November 2020.

Increasing the wearing of face coverings in our indoor workplaces – we all have a responsibility to protect ourselves, each other and our families.

As agreed between RMG, CWU and Unite/CMA, the wearing of a face covering has been mandatory in **ALL** Royal Mail Group units and offices since 9 November 2020. Through robust risk assessment, RMG has identified the mandatory wearing of face coverings in the workplace as a necessary additional control measure (a view shared by regulatory bodies such as the Health and Safety Executive, NHS and Government Chief Medical Officer Chris Whitty,). Face coverings do not replace other preventative measures, i.e. increased hand hygiene, social distancing, increased cleaning, etc, which must remain in place. RMG, CWU and unite/CMA remain strongly committed to these Covid-Secure principles.

All employees have a legal duty to take all reasonable care for the health and safety of themselves and others, and to cooperate with the business in relation to its Health & Safety legislative requirements to ensure the safety of the workforce so far as is reasonable practicable. Employees also have a Health and Safety legal responsibility and are required to comply with the safety instruction to wear a face covering unless an exemption applies. We have seen some excellent examples where indoor workplaces are wearing face coverings and uptake has been good across the country.

When you do not need to wear a face covering

Royal Mail Group fully recognises that some employees are unable to wear face coverings for medical or psychological reasons which covers a wide range of illnesses, impairments or disability. Managers must be mindful and respectful of such circumstances and will work jointly with Union Representatives to ensure these employees are not penalised or otherwise discriminated against based on exemption. Some people are less able to wear face coverings, and the reasons for this may not be visible to others. Face shields are an option for those employees that cannot wear a face covering (NOTE: Face Shields alone are not a suitable alternative for any employee who doesn't have a genuine, evidenced exemption).

Royal Mail Group also recognises that face coverings are not practical to wear for some activities in certain job roles, e.g. in a call centre where social distancing measures are in place.

Employees who are hard of hearing and rely on lipreading can share any concerns they may have around face coverings with their line manager or Union Representative and discuss options to resolve any communication barriers. Face coverings including regular replacements and renewals to ensure cleanliness and hygiene will be supplied to employees by Royal Mail Group. Additionally, alternatively, where colleagues would like to wear a clear face covering (that meets basic safety requirements), these can be purchased locally and claimed back via travel and expenses.

Medical/other exemptions – change in approach

Royal Mail Group fully accept that some employees will have exemptions and some conditions will not be visible as referred to above. However, to support our duty of care and ensure we are managing risk appropriately as the country faces a new virus strain and significantly higher transmission and infection

rates, managers can now request evidence of an exemption without needing to know the medical/other reason. This is required to ensure robust and consistent application of the mandatory wearing of face coverings. Managers can also keep records that employees have met the criteria for the exemption but should *not* record the specific reason, even if the employee shares this with the manager. Once confirmed, employees with genuine exemption will be supported and will not be 'routinely' asked to provide written evidence.

What evidence of an exemption is sufficient?

In many cases, employees with an existing health condition will have appropriate medical correspondence such as hospital letters, consultant letters, NHS letters or appointment cards, OH reports, documented conversations with managers about their condition e.g. welcome back meetings, rehabilitation plans, attendance reviews which can be provided as evidence, with the specific condition hidden/redacted (e.g. by an appropriately placed post-it note or using a marker-pen) if the employee chooses. Should employees not have existing evidence of their condition they can request a letter from their GP confirming the exemption, without including the specific condition, but should be aware if there is a charge involved that they will not be reimbursed. If this is the case they should speak to their line manager who can contact Advice & Support on 0345 6043657.

An exemption certificate or badge (which can be printed off or purchased from various online sites), or the wearing of a sunflower lanyard, is not sufficient evidence on its own, and therefore managers can still request appropriate evidence in these circumstances.

What action should managers take if an employee does not wear a face covering where required and is unable to share evidence that they have an exemption?

Managers should contact Advice and Support on 0345 6043657 with questions related to employees who refuse to wear a face covering in indoor settings. The key message is to engage employees in understanding the importance of wearing face coverings as an additional protective measure, reminding them of the duty of care owed by the business and their legal responsibilities as an employee (to cooperate with the business in relation to Royal Mail Group's Health and Safety Legal requirements to provide a safe and healthy place of work so far as is reasonably practicable and to take reasonable care of themselves and others who might be impacted by their actions).

Visitors and contractors

On-site visitors and contractors should be asked to wear a face covering. Evidence of exemptions do not need to be requested.

Supply of face coverings and visors

Face coverings and visors are available for all employees from their manager. Employees may also choose to wear their own personal face coverings but these must not have an exhalation valve. Improved, branded, washable, face coverings will be provided to all operational staff. These masks can be more comfortable for the wearer and are better for the environment.

Dr Shaun Davis

RMG Global Director Compliance & Sustainability

Dave Joyce

CWU National Health, Safety & Environment Officer

Stephen Jones

Unite/CMA National Safety Lead

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