

The Government recognises that a wider group of people continues to be more clinically vulnerable (CV) to Covid-19 than the general population due to their medical circumstances. Government guidance on clinically vulnerable people includes pregnant women in this category. Many of these individuals are also at higher risk for other reasons, with age, sex, ethnicity, pregnancy and factors linked with economic disadvantage being very significant. A combination of factors relating to medical vulnerability and known higher risk characteristics can compound and significantly increase the risk to individuals. The current situation poses a substantial level of risk for CV staff, particularly in areas of higher infection rates. For all CV employees, the joint unions again expect employers to conduct individual risk assessments in relation to working at home. We are calling on employers to prioritise home working options for CV employees until infection rates fall locally. This measure will be particularly important where staff have even greater increased vulnerability due to a combination of factors or work in roles involving greater risk. As noted above, where the usual role cannot be undertaken from home, employers should consider temporary changes to duties and should accept that in a small number of cases, employees may be at home on full pay without duties to fulfil. Where CV employees do not believe that the measures identified by the employer are enough to keep them safe in the workplace, they should inform their local union rep and immediately seek supporting evidence from their doctor and a referral to occupational health. Whilst this process is underway, we would support CV employees being permitted to work at home until a decision can be made based on all the relevant medical information. Where staff choose to continue to work in school/college, risk assessments should consider what protective measures such as social distancing and personal protection should be adopted for them.

Pregnant women and new mothers

The law requires employers to consider, when conducting risk assessments, the risks to employees who are pregnant or new mothers (those who have given birth in the previous six months) and to suspend them on full pay if it is impossible to avoid risks to their health & safety. Pregnant women continue to be included in the Government's list of those who are clinically vulnerable. The Government has referred schools to advice and guidance from the Royal College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists which notes that, while pregnant women may not be more likely to become infected by Covid-19, those who contract any respiratory illnesses in the third trimester of pregnancy (ie the 28th week and beyond) can become seriously unwell. It also notes that absolute assurance cannot be given that contracting Covid-19 carries no greater risk to women at an earlier stage of their pregnancy and carries no risk to the unborn baby. Finally, it notes that some pregnant women and new mothers may be at increased risk due to other factors. The DfE advice says in relation to the RCOG guidance that "we advise employers and pregnant women to follow this advice". The RCOG has previously recommended, in relation to healthcare workers, that for women in the first two trimesters of pregnancy, employers should "remove any risks that are greater in the workplace than to what they would be exposed to outside of the workplace", and that women in the third trimester should be allowed to work at home. The joint unions believe that education employers should consider this in their individual risk assessments for pregnant women and new mothers.

Given the known greater risks to women in their third trimester of pregnancy, UNISON's advice is that they should be permitted to work from home until their chosen date for starting maternity leave or, if this is not possible, suspended on full pay. This should also be considered as an appropriate measure to remove risks to other pregnant women, in particular those who may be at increased risk due to other factors. We advise pregnant women who are seeking to work at home or are suspended on maternity grounds to write to the employer to confirm they intend their maternity leave to start at the Expected Week of Childbirth (EWC).

If you need further support , please get in touch with [your local branch](#).