

16 December 2021

Rt Hon Boris Johnson
Prime Minister

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Paddy Lillis
General Secretary

Dear Mr Johnson

Review of Workplace Coronavirus Guidance and Safety Measures

The emergence of the highly transmissible Omicron variant is a deeply concerning development for Usdaw members. Omicron's rapid spread leaves our members, who have worked tirelessly on the frontline as key workers throughout the pandemic, at increased risk of infection. Further action is needed to protect retail workers from the risk of catching coronavirus and the subsequent requirement to self-isolate following a positive test.

Usdaw is calling on the Government to urgently update the workplace coronavirus guidance and reintroduce adequate social distancing and safety measures. Social distancing is a key tool in the fight against coronavirus, particularly within retail, where workers are required to interact with the general public every day. Such measures were clearly highlighted within the risk assessments that Usdaw conducted in partnership with many retailers during earlier stages of the crisis.

The Union believes the Government should also promote the importance of good ventilation as a vital workplace coronavirus health and safety measure. Proper workplace ventilation is an essential component of creating safe working environments, and it substantially reduces the risk of infection spreading through the workforce. It is crucial that the need to improve ventilation in workplaces is communicated effectively in the workplace guidance and in the Government's public facing statements. Consideration should also be given to the reintroduction of controls on the numbers in shops at any one time to avoid overcrowding.

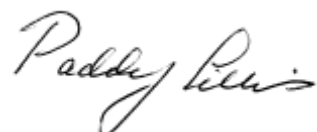
All possible health and safety measures should be under review at this time, with cases being forecast to spike significantly. It is clear that further safeguards are needed to protect retail workers, over and above those set out in the current guidance.

In light of the developments with the Omicron variant, especially the increased transmissibility, Usdaw is again urging the Government to review sick pay provisions. At the moment, individuals who catch Covid in the workplace may face a significant financial detriment, with their wages falling to £96.35 per week if they qualify for SSP, and to nothing if they do not qualify. This disproportionately impacts key workers who have continued to attend the workplace in order to help the country get through the crisis. Usdaw is calling for Statutory Sick Pay to be increased to an individual's normal earnings.

Usdaw is keen to provide support and assistance in preparing updates to the Government's coronavirus workplace guidance, and is more than happy to offer our expertise on safety measures within the retail sector.

I look forward to hearing from you shortly.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Paddy Lillis'.

PADDY LILLIS
General Secretary