



## TUC calls on government to tackle coronavirus with immediate #SickPayForAll

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### Issue date

03 Mar 2020

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- **Nearly 2 million workers aren't eligible for Statutory Sick Pay, including a third of zero-hours contract workers**
- **TUC calls for emergency legislation to provide sick pay for all workers from day one of sickness, regardless of how much they earn**

The TUC is calling on the government to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak by providing emergency support for the millions of UK workers who are currently missing out on Statutory Sick Pay (SSP).

In a letter to Matt Hancock and Thérèse Coffey, TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady warns that inadequate provision of sick pay could stop people taking up public health advice, since many workers will struggle to meet basic living costs if they can't attend work for a prolonged period.

As a result, some may feel they have no choice but to go to work while ill, or against government advice.

Currently, nearly 2 million of the lowest-paid workers don't earn enough to qualify for statutory sick pay. According to TUC analysis this includes:

- 34% of workers on zero-hours contracts
- 1 in 10 women in work
- More than a fifth (22%) of workers aged 16-24

- More than a quarter (26%) of workers aged 65 and over, identified by government as one of the groups most vulnerable to the virus

To address the issue the TUC is calling for government to introduce an emergency support package for workers affected by the virus, including:

- Emergency legislation to ensure Statutory Sick Pay coverage for all workers from the first day of sickness, regardless of how much they earn.
- An increase in the amount of sick pay to the equivalent of the real living wage of £320 a week.
- A requirement that those asked by their employer to self-isolate on public health grounds remain on full pay.
- An emergency fund to assist employers with the cost and to cover workers not currently eligible for Statutory Sick Pay.

TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady said:

"We all want people to follow the government's health advice. No one should be out of pocket for doing the right thing.

"But as it stands, many people won't be able to meet basic living costs if they stay home from work.

"This is an impossible choice that has serious implications for us all. The fairest and simplest solution is to immediately reform sick pay legislation so it covers all workers at a decent rate.

"It's the sensible way to give working families the security they need - and to protect public health."

**ENDS**

**Notes to editors:**

- A **TUC petition** (<https://www.megaphone.org.uk/petitions/sick-pay-for-every-worker-on-day-one>) calling for every worker to get sick pay from day one has gathered more than 10,000 signatures.

- Government advice issued today (Tuesday) suggests that up to a fifth of the workforce may be off sick during the peak of a coronavirus epidemic: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-action-plan>  
(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-action-plan>)

- Data on workers ineligible for Statutory Sick Pay is from ONS 2019 Q3. Data on zero-hours workers is from ONS 2019 Q2 (the latest data available which shows the incomes of workers on zero hours contracts).

- TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady has today written to the Secretaries of State for Health and for Work and Pensions.

**Her full letter reads:**

*Dear Secretary of State,*

*We are writing to call on the government to introduce emergency support for the millions of UK workers who are currently missing out on Statutory Sick Pay (SSP). We believe this is an essential step in ensuring that workers are able to comply with the public health advice that the government is giving.*

*More cases of COVID-19 - widely referred to as coronavirus - are being confirmed in the UK, as the Department of Health warns that it is highly likely that the spread could significantly increase. The government's own plans indicate that up to a fifth of the workforce may be off work during the peak of the epidemic.*

*The government has confirmed that any worker who is required to go into self-isolation, quarantine or who falls ill with symptoms will be entitled to SSP.*

*Because nearly two million workers in the UK don't currently earn enough to qualify for sick pay, many may find themselves struggling to make ends meet. Even for those who are eligible, the payment is still too low at just £94.25 a week. And workers at present must be off sick for four days or more in a row to receive any SSP.*

*These arrangements, if not improved, may lead to workers not taking the appropriate time off work, either in self-isolation to prevent infection, or when genuinely ill in order to avoid a financial loss. This is an impossible choice that has serious implications for us all.*

*Workers who are currently excluded from SSP because they don't meet the earnings threshold include:*

- 34 per cent of workers on zero-hours contracts
- 1 in 10 women in work
- 62 per cent of workers aged 16-24, and over half of workers aged 65 and over.

*While the current health emergency has brought this issue to the forefront of public debate, we believe that the fairest and simplest response is to reform SSP in order to address the existing inequality in the provision of SSP and ensure universal coverage for all workers, regardless of how much they earn.*

*The government has confirmed that emergency legislation may be required to enable measures to contain the virus. We believe the government should also be putting together emergency support for workers faced with the threat of the virus that would include:*

- *Emergency legislation to ensure universal SSP coverage for all workers*
- *An emergency fund to assist employers with the cost of this and to provide support for those workers who will not currently receive SSP.*

*Emergency legislation on SSP should be enacted to:*

- *Remove current waiting times to ensure that SSP is available from day one of absence*
- *Remove the lower earnings threshold to ensure that everyone is entitled to SSP regardless of how much they earn*
- *Increase the weekly rate of SSP to the equivalent of a week's pay at the Real Living Wage.*

*The government should also take specific steps in the context of the coronavirus to:*

- *Ensure that workers who have been required by their employer to self-isolate are treated as at work and therefore receive full pay.*
- *Ensure that workers who have received health advice to self-isolate are treated as sick for the purposes of contractual or statutory sick pay, including taking measures to ensure that these workers can receive a Fit Note where this is required.*

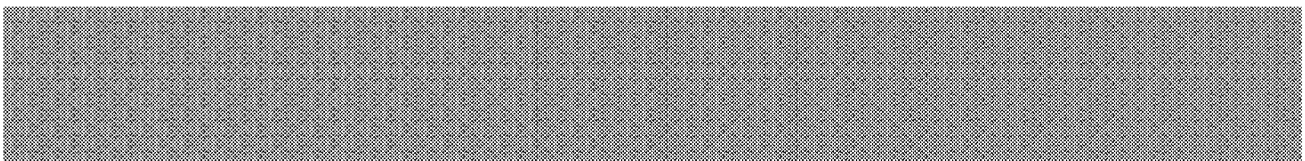
*Given the potential for this health crisis to escalate rapidly, we would welcome swift and decisive action by your government in order to provide the security and safety that all workers should be entitled to.*

*Regards,*

*Frances O'Grady*

*General Secretary*

*- The Trades Union Congress (TUC) exists to make the working world a better place for everyone. We bring together more than 5.5 million working people who make up our 48 member unions. We support unions to grow and thrive, and we stand up for everyone who works for a living.*



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