

Options for allowing outdoor workers to return to work: a discussion document

Purpose of document

- To stimulate discussion amongst the Scottish Government's COVID-19 CMO Advisory Group (henceforth Advisory Group) on the potential range of options for enabling those who predominantly work outdoors (henceforth outdoor workers) to return to work
- To identify areas of further work to enable a consensus position to emerge amongst members of the Advisory Group on the return to work by outdoor workers

SARS-CoV-2 infection and transmission, and development of COVID-19 in adults

- People of any age can get infected with SARS-CoV-2
- Transmission is predominantly through respiratory droplets, fomites and contact with contaminated surfaces; airborne transmission is a possibility in specific circumstances and settings that generate aerosols
- There appears to be greater risk of transmission in indoor than outdoor spaces
- It is estimated that 1/3 of transmission is through schools and workplaces
- A proportion of those infected will develop COVID-19
- Outcomes appear to be particularly poor in the elderly, those with underlying chronic disorders and those with substantially raised BMI

UK/Scottish lockdown and outdoor workers

- The current lockdown began on 23 March 2020 and resulted in (amongst other restrictions) all non-essential workers being asked to work from home in an attempt to help maintain physical distancing and through so doing reduce transmission of SARS-CoV-2
- These restrictions were extended on 16 April 2020 for a minimum additional 21 days
- On 17 April 2020, the UK Government outlined five criteria that would need to be met before lockdown measures could be lifted, namely: i) the NHS must be able to cope; ii) sustained and consistent falls in daily death rates; iii) reliable evidence of infection rates decreasing to manageable levels; iv) confidence that there is sufficient testing capability and personal protective equipment (PPE); and v) confidence that lifting restrictions will not result in a second peak.

Categories of UK outdoor key workers

- Food and other necessary goods: Food chain workers, including those involved in production, processing, distribution, sale and delivery of goods.
- Key public services: Postal workers and those responsible for managing the deceased
- Utility workers: Staff needed to keep oil, gas, electricity, water and sewerage operations running. Staff in the civil nuclear, chemical and telecommunications sectors.
- Public safety and national security: Police and support staff, Ministry of Defence civilian staff and armed forces personnel, fire and rescue staff, and workers responsible for border security, prisons and probation.
- Transport: Those keeping air, water, road, and rail passenger and freight transport modes operating.

Outdoor workers not allowed to work

- Markets selling non-essential goods (i.e. anything other than food)
- Caravan parks - except those where people live permanently
- Gardeners, landscapers
- Construction workers, masons, roofers

- Scientists: Archaeologists, cartologists, ecologists, geologists, zoologists etc
- Sportspeople
- Outdoor events: Festivals, fairground workers, etc

Impact of the lockdown

- The majority of non-essential outdoor workers (e.g. construction workers, gardeners and garden centre employees) are unable to work from home
- Some such workers are likely to be amongst the most socioeconomically marginalised and may therefore be disproportionately affected by the lockdown

Possible options

1. To maintain the current situation which discourages all non-essential outdoor workers from working outside the home
 2. To allow all those who work outside the home to return to work as normal
 3. To allow select groups of those who work outside the home to return to work as normal provided that:
 - Physical distancing can be maintained most of the time
 - Personal protective equipment (PPE) is worn when physical distancing cannot be maintained
- Note: Any return to work will likely need to be accompanied by:
 - Measures to maintain physical distancing as far as possible
 - Regular cleaning of shared tools/utensils
 - Early detection, test, trace and isolate policies of workers
 - Provision of PPE
 - Encouragement to walk, cycle or use private vehicles (e.g. by suspending parking restrictions) rather than using public transport
 - Where public transport cannot be avoided use of face masks should be encouraged as well as physical distancing

Special considerations

- Outdoor workers who are in a shielded/high risk category for COVID-19
- Outdoor workers living with someone in a shielded/high risk category for COVID-19

Suggested way forward for Scotland

- Allow select groups of outdoor workers beginning with those in the construction, gardening and scientific sectors to return to work once 5 criteria met
- Continuous review of Scottish data on effects on transmission, new cases, hospital and ICU admissions, and deaths
- Continuous learning from other countries

Next steps

- Internal discussion amongst Advisory Group
- If consensus reached:
 - Discussions with:
 - FM
 - SAGE
 - Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture (Fiona Hyslop)
 - SG Director of Lockdown Exit Planning (Dominic Munro)
 - Trade unions
 - Modelling impact
 - Behavioural messaging for outdoor workers and their families
- Assuming above are positive, decide on a date to enable outdoor workers to return to work.