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By Email

Rt Hon Boris Johnson
Prime Minister

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Paddy Lillis
General Secretary

Dear Mr Johnson

Exemption from Self-Isolation Scheme

Usdaw is deeply disappointed that on Friday, 23 July, the Government announced to the media a scheme which will allow isolation exemptions for 'critical workers' who are deemed to be close contacts of individuals who test positive for Covid-19, yet has still not published full details of the scheme. Usdaw Union has now been contacted by employers stating that they have been advised they will be eligible for the scheme yet it is not at all clear exactly what the scheme entails.

Our members in industries which have apparently been included in the scheme have played a key role in ensuring that the country can get through the pandemic. Usdaw is extremely concerned that removing the requirement or guidance for these workers to self-isolate when they have been identified as a close contact is likely to further increase infection rates. Usdaw members in these industries typically work in large workplaces which are environments where infection can spread rapidly.

It should not be forgotten that the current issue over the number of people required to self-isolate is being caused by high rates of infection. Usdaw firmly believes that the Government should be taking all appropriate measures to drive down infection rates rather than softening rules, something which is highly likely to result in higher rates of infection. Immediate Government measures to tackle infection rates must include reverting to Covid safety measures, including mandatory face coverings and social distancing, in all public indoor spaces. We are also calling on the Government to develop effective local public-health based tracing systems to identify the people who need to isolate and make sure they get the practical and financial support they need to enable them to do so.

So far, the scheme has already been criticised for causing chaos across multiple industries. Usdaw is deeply concerned that Government mishandling, not only of the virus but also of the exemption scheme, has resulted in a position that is putting people's health, and the functioning of the economy, at significant risk.

Throughout the pandemic, Usdaw, along with other trade unions, has been eager to work with the Government on the issues the country has faced. As such, it is deeply concerning that the Government has sought to create a scheme to exempt workers from self-isolation without consulting with worker representatives. This approach has unfortunately led to a significant number of issues which, we believe, need to be urgently addressed before the scheme can move forward:

- The [short press release](#) issued on the Government website states that individuals 'can instead take daily tests'. Please would you confirm that participation in the scheme will be voluntary for those who do not want to put their colleagues at increased risk of Covid infection. Please would you also advise how the voluntary element will be enforced to ensure that individuals do not face any detriment as a result of not participating in the scheme?
- The press release also refers to testing sites having been set up at the workplaces where exemptions are being allowed. Does this mean that all workers who are being exempted are expected to take part in supervised tests at their workplace or are some going to be allowed to do the tests at home by themselves? Lateral flow tests are not very reliable. One of the main

concerns about them being used for these daily tests is that a negative LFD test result is not a guarantee that the person is infection-free, but they are known to be more accurate where they are done under supervision.

- Various media sources have reported that there will be two schemes running concurrently, one which will include the food supply chain and will operate irrespective of an individual's vaccination status, and a second for other 'critical industries' which will be dependent on an individual's vaccination status. Please would you publish the scientific advice which supports the position of a scheme operating within the food supply chain that runs irrespective of an individual's vaccination status? You have frequently praised the impact of the vaccine on driving down both infection rates and the numbers of people suffering serious illness as a result of the virus. It would now seem odd to ignore this impact in relation to workers in the food supply chain.
- Initial reports of the scheme stated that any workplaces taking part in the daily test programme would have to revert to mandatory face coverings and social distancing. Please would you confirm that this remains the case?
- Participation in the scheme is likely to increase the likelihood of workplace infections. Please would you confirm that all workplaces taking part in the scheme will have to pass an urgent Health and Safety inspection from the relevant authority ahead of participation in the scheme? This inspection should cover issues such as ventilation, adherence to mandatory face coverings and other Covid safety measures such as social distancing and hygiene measures.
- As part of the health and safety programme behind the scheme, it is also essential to ensure that the impact of the scheme is regularly reviewed. Please advise what provisions are being put in place to ensure that any Covid outbreaks in exempt workplaces are immediately identified and resolved.
- It is clear that workers should face absolutely no detriment as a result of their employer's participation in the scheme at their workplace. As such, please would you confirm that any worker from an exempt workplace who tests positive for the virus will receive full sick pay at their normal earnings? Furthermore, please confirm that the Government will ensure that any absences arising from a positive test will be excluded from potential disciplinary action.

The above questions outline a number of key concerns over the implementation of a self-isolation exemption scheme. I would be grateful if you could provide responses to the above questions as soon as possible.

Usdaw shares concerns about the impact of the current infection rate on the food supply chain and remains ready to assist the Government in identifying resolutions to the current situation.

I look forward to hearing from you or your team shortly.

Yours sincerely



PADDY LILLIS
General Secretary

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