

Workplace Deaths Related to Coronavirus

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On the same day that the Government is encouraging people to return to work, a new [report from the ONS](#) suggests that some workers face a significantly higher risk of death related to coronavirus than others. Compiled with data on coronavirus related deaths in the UK, the ONS study indicates that **a security guard is more than eight times more likely to die because of coronavirus than someone in a professional occupation. Considering this new information, the Government must urgently review their decision to encourage people back to work.** Other sectors where disproportionately high death rates are apparent are in transport, manufacturing, and construction.

Higher death rates are seen in workplaces where it is not possible to social distance. The security guard and lorry driver must travel to work while many professionals are able to work from home. Particularly high death rates are also seen amongst bus drivers and taxi drivers, both necessarily coming into frequent and close contact with members of the public through their work. **A strategy to test, track and trace the virus at a community level is vital so that local authorities can control the spread of the virus and prevent people facing an unacceptably high risk of death from potential exposure to the virus in their workplace.**

Many workers in apparently higher risk jobs either work in the gig economy or are on zero-hours contracts. Such precarious new modes of employment effectively remove the employees' right to leave a workplace that is unsafe, as is enshrined in [Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act 1996](#). **For the security guard, minicab driver or assembly line worker who is forced into an unsafe working environment, these risks represent not only a risk for them, but for their family and community who they may take the virus back to when they return home from work.**

The economic rewards of the Government encouraging a return to work are likely to benefit those in management and professional employment. The ONS indicates that managers, directors, senior officials, and those in professional occupations who are set to gain the most from a return to work will also experience the lowest risk of coronavirus related death in the workplace. Conversely, **many of those who face the highest risk of death from returning to work will be returning to precarious and low-paid employment.** It is hard to imagine a starker demonstration of the inequality that has become so prevalent in modern Britain. It is the Government's duty to resolve such inequality. **Their current attempts to encourage people back to work when the UK has one of the highest rates of coronavirus in the World risks forcing many people to their deaths.**

The country needs to return to work but cannot do so unless [five basic tests](#) are met, as set out by the National Education Union who say that there must be:

- **far lower numbers of Covid-19 cases**
- **a national plan for social distancing**
- **a comprehensive plan for testing for Covid-19**
- **a social distancing strategy in every workplace**
- **a strategy for protecting the most vulnerable**

The Government has not met any of these tests and are unlikely to do so until they provide greater support to enable Local Authorities and NHS Trusts to Test, Track and Trace the virus. Until they meet these five tests, the Government are unnecessarily risking lives by encouraging a return to work. Parliament must ensure that the advice to encourage a return to work is reviewed now.

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