



**Welcome to this UNISON News update for members working in childcare settings in NI. It includes essential information on:**

- all you need to know for a safe return to work – including links to important health & safety resources;
- updates on our UNISON College Education & Training Programme and our welfare support charity, There for You.



You will also find information on how you and a friend can win £100 each by entering our 'Recruit a Friend' Prize Draw. See full details on Page 8.

## All you need to know for a safe return to work

UNISON is aware that many childcare facilities are now beginning to re-open as the Covid-19 lockdown begins to ease and more people return to their workplaces. The definition of a keyworker that can access childcare has been expanded.

UNISON is here to provide advice and representation for our members working in childcare settings who may be concerned

about the health and safety of the children they care for, their colleagues and themselves.

If you have concerns about what is happening in your workplace or would like to become a health & safety rep, please contact your branch. You can find branch details [here](http://www.unison-ni.org.uk/branches) ([www.unison-ni.org.uk/branches](http://www.unison-ni.org.uk/branches))

## What does your employer have to do before your workplace can re-open?

The advice from the NI Executive is that childcare facilities can begin to re-open on a phased basis, following certain conditions. Your employer must put in place a number of measures to protect you and the children.

Before re-opening, your employer:

- Must have sufficient numbers of children attending;
- Must inform the HSC Trust Early Years Team about their plans to provide care as safely as possible for children in each setting and complete a risk assessment to ensure that care can be provided as safely as possible to children.

**Play Pods:** Alongside regular hand cleaning, hygiene and cleaning measures, your employer should maintain small group sizes (known as Play Pods) to reduce the risk of transmission of Covid-19. Children and staff should, where possible, only mix in a small, consistent group. Each small group should stay away from other people and groups in the childcare setting. The same staff and children should stay with each other each day, throughout the day. A Play Pod should normally have no more than 12 children in it. There must be two adults in each Play Pod at all times.

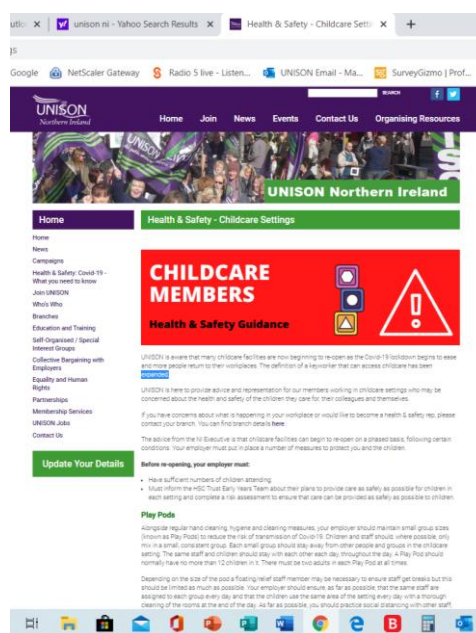
Depending on the size of the pod a floating/relief staff member may be necessary to ensure staff get breaks but this should be limited as much as possible. Your employer should ensure, as far as possible, that the same staff are assigned to each group every day and that the children use the same area of the setting every day with a thorough cleaning of the rooms at the end of the day. As far as possible, you should practice social distancing with other staff, including those within your Play Pod.

**Infection Prevention:** Your employer should have policies in place around infection control and these must have been updated in light of Covid-19. You must have been given access to online training/information on Covid-19

## What if a child or worker becomes sick?

Your employer should have a clear plan in place if a child becomes sick, both for children displaying the symptoms of Covid-19 and those without these symptoms. There should be a designated area where sick children can be attended to by a limited number of trained staff. If direct care is required while waiting for a child to be collected, you should be given PPE to wear (a mask, apron and gloves). PPE

(<http://childcarepartnerships.hscni.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/COVID-19-IPC-Resource-for-CC-Settings-1.pdf>) and your employer must make sure you are familiar with this. Your employer must make sure sufficient handwashing facilities are available, or provide hand sanitiser in rooms.



Your employer should also make sure that shared spaces and shared resources are used in a much more restricted way (e.g. stagger the use of staff rooms and office spaces, prevent the sharing of stationery and other equipment).

should also be provided for those caring for the child if a distance of 2 metres cannot be maintained. If a risk assessment determines that there is a risk of splashing to the eyes, then eye protection should also be worn.

If you or your colleagues become unwell and are displaying the symptoms of Covid-19 you should be sent home immediately

and should self-isolate for 7 days. You should be tested for Covid-19 as an essential worker (<https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/covid-19-coronavirus/testing-and-tracing-covid-19/testing-covid-19#testing-for-essential->

## Shielding

If you have been shielding during Covid-19, the advice is that you should not work outside your home. You should rigorously follow shielding measures to stay safe. Your employer should support you to do this, such as by asking you to carry out work from home. If you are considered 'clinically vulnerable' (but are not shielding) and cannot work from home, you should be offered the safest possible roles at work, staying 2 metres away from others wherever possible.

[workers](#)). If you test negative, you can return to work. If you test positive, the rest of your Play Pod (including other workers) should be sent home to self-isolate for 14 days.

If you live with someone who is clinically vulnerable, including those who are pregnant, you can attend the childcare setting. However, if you live with someone who is shielding the advice is that you should not attend the childcare setting as strict social distancing cannot be maintained.

Read the full guidance on re-opening childcare settings [here](#) (<https://www.familysupportni.gov.uk/NewsStory/111/latest-advice-for-parents-and-childcare-providers-29-june-2020>)

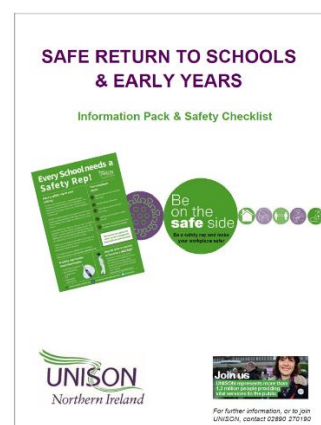
## New UNISON health and safety advice and guidance for activists and members in the education and early years sectors

As schools, early years and childcare services start to expand, UNISON are negotiating with Government and employers to ensure agreement round safe opening, including risk assessments, staff training and clear guidance on safe working practices.

UNISON members across the sector can't avoid close contact with children, especially young children. They comfort children, give medicines, support children with disabilities and support children at lunchtime and other settings. The safety of all is vital and we need to all be properly prepared.

UNISON has produced a range of new health and safety advice and guidance for activists and members in the education and early years sectors, whether you've been

working throughout the pandemic or are returning to the workplace now. See the new UNISON guide, 'Safe return to schools & early years – Information pack and safety checklist' at [www.unison-ni.org.uk/health-safety-education](http://www.unison-ni.org.uk/health-safety-education).



The purpose of this pack is to make trade union involvement a reality on

the ground for our growing number of members in schools and early years.

Staff have skills, they know their jobs. Risk assessments and then action to

## How do I challenge unsafe work?

Where groups of workers, or individuals, wish to challenge unsafe work this is done through a 3 Stage process for keeping people safe:

**Stage 1: Guidance & Dialogue:** Most work arrangements are being addressed and resolved through direct dialogue with employers around existing guidance. However, if you are concerned about the application of the guidance to your workplace you should use the checklist in the UNISON guide, '[Safe return to schools & early years – Information pack and safety checklist](http://www.unison-ni.org.uk/health-safety-education)' - [www.unison-ni.org.uk/health-safety-education](http://www.unison-ni.org.uk/health-safety-education). You should also work collectively with colleagues and seek support from your local rep and your UNISON branch.

The Checklist will help you work with your colleagues to ensure that relevant guidance is being followed and your safety needs addressed. This covers use of risk assessments, access to PPE, provision of hand sanitisers, compliance with social distancing and much more. If the Checklist reveals risks that are not resolved through guidance and dialogue with your line manager, you may want to formally challenge. Before progressing, you should contact your branch. Wherever possible, work collectively as a group.

**Stage 2: Challenge:** Where the checklist reveals the need for action on safety, and members want to make a complaint, UNISON will formally notify the employer and call for specific action on safety. The notice will explain our concerns (identified using the checklist) and set out your right

mitigate risks need to be in place to ensure that children and staff are safe. This is no time for short cuts.

to safety at work. We will also explain the legal protection you have when raising safety issues. If a formal challenge to unsafe work does not secure improved arrangements, and you relay your concerns to UNISON, we will advise you on the available options at Stage 3.



**Stage 3: Action:** In extreme situations there are legal rules that enable workers to withdraw from unsafe situations. The rules for withdrawing from a work situation are as follows:

- You face a serious danger to your health
- The danger you face is immediate or imminent
- Your belief that you face imminent danger is reasonable
- You have used all available measures to protect yourself and avert the risk to health

**Always seek advice first. Use the checklist and the contacts below if you believe you need to withdraw from an unsafe situation.**

## Covid19 and your safety rights – A safety checklist for members

Safety Reps have certain legal rights which can really help them make a difference for their members. Safety Reps have unique powers in the battle to keep our members safe. These includes the right to represent members on anything affecting their safety, carry out workplace inspections, and to time off to perform their role.

It is the employer's duty to keep their workers safe, and safety reps have a vital role in holding employers to account. Employers have a legal duty to consult with safety reps on anything affecting their members' safety so reps should be asking employers to see their risk assessment, if they haven't seen them already. Safety Reps also have the right to conduct their own workplace inspections, and in some cases employers and UNISON Safety Reps have worked in partnership to carry out joint inspections and risk assessments.

Most work arrangements are being addressed and resolved through dialogue with employers around existing guidance. However, if you are concerned about the application of the guidance to your workplace you should use the checklist in 'Safe return to schools & early years – Information pack and safety checklist' - [www.unison-ni.org.uk/health-safety-education](http://www.unison-ni.org.uk/health-safety-education) - to ensure that relevant guidance is being followed. Work collectively with colleagues, and seek support from your branch and the UNISON regional office where required.

### We want to hear from you!

If you have any specific issues you want to make us aware of please email us at [UnisonNorthernIreland@unison.co.uk](mailto:UnisonNorthernIreland@unison.co.uk).

1. **About you.** Tell us your name and your contact details so that we can get in touch if necessary. This will be easier if you provide your mobile number, email, employer, workplace and briefly describe the work that you do.
2. **Tell us any H&S concerns you may have related to your school or facility opening up more widely.**

These concerns may range across a wide a variety of issues including:

- Maintenance of a safe environment
- Building health and safety checks on issues such as hot and cold water systems; gas and fire safety; kitchen equipment; specialist equipment used by pupils
- Cleaning and hygiene arrangements
- Safe movement around the school for staff and children
- Safe staffing, staff availability and rotas
- Assessed risks to Black and Minority Ethnic staff
- Involvement of respective catering, cleaning, classroom assistants and other support staff in discussions about how meals will be served, staffing levels, safety etc
- Social distancing & PPE arrangements
- Special measures related to SEN provision
- Changes to routines for staff and pupils

- Communication arrangements for staff and parents
- Managing pupil and staff wellbeing and mental health: Are you satisfied

that appropriate measures will be in place when the school begins to open more widely?

## Every childcare facility needs a safety rep - Be on the **safe** side

UNISON is launching a new 'Be on the **safe** side' health & safety campaign #BeOnTheSafeSide. We are looking to recruit an army of new safety reps to join our many hundreds of accredited reps to make sure public services in NI are Covid Secure.

If you work in early years, why not think about becoming a health and safety rep? Never have safety reps been more important. We need to ensure the risks to staff and children are assessed and managed. Full training will be available and you will always have someone to mentor you and talk you through any issues or problems you may have.

### Useful H&S links

UNISON has produced a range of new health and safety advice and guidance for activists and members, whether they've been working throughout the pandemic or are returning to work now.

Click [www.unison-ni.org.uk/health-safety-covid-19-what-you-need-know](http://www.unison-ni.org.uk/health-safety-covid-19-what-you-need-know) for information on how to work safely, risk assessments and current guidance on social distancing, use of PPE and other



Try out our 'Health and Safety 101' sessions over the summer and if you decide to progress to becoming a rep we can offer fully accredited training before you return in September.

Contact UNISON on 02890 270190 for more details. You can also fill in an on-line form at <https://www.unison.org.uk/unison-health-and-safety/become-safety-rep/>.

resources.

As guidance changes on a regular basis you should also access up to date guidance on re-opening childcare settings [here](https://www.familysupportni.gov.uk/NewsStory/111/latest-advice-for-parents-and-childcare-providers-29-june-2020) (<https://www.familysupportni.gov.uk/NewsStory/111/latest-advice-for-parents-and-childcare-providers-29-june-2020>) and NI Direct website - [www.nidirect.gov.uk](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk).

## Are you facing any problems at work?

Contact your UNISON branch now if you are facing any of the following issues

- Have you had issues with your pay or annual leave? The National Living Wage and National Minimum Wage increased on April 1st please follow link to see the current rates: <https://www.gov.uk/national-minimum-wage-rates>
- Has there been changes to your contract or post? For example, is your contract being terminated or are your hours being changed?
- Are you facing redundancy?

If so, please contact your local UNISON branch - [www.unison-ni.org.uk/branches](http://www.unison-ni.org.uk/branches)

## UNISON College – Our Activist and Member Learning Programme

Our Activist and Member Learning Programme continues to be identified by members in childcare as one of our most important areas of work. Both programmes give support to members and activists especially at a time when employers are cutting back on their training and development programmes.

We offer over 180 workshops for all members across 90 topics such as autism, health & safety, palliative care, resilience, bereavement, communicating effectively, interview skills, drugs and alcohol, epilepsy, Parkinson's, suicide awareness, dealing with challenging behaviour and Makaton. All of our courses are now hosted at [www.unisoncollegeni.org.uk](http://www.unisoncollegeni.org.uk).

If you open it on your phone, you can save the page on your homepage as an app style icon. Just set up an account and once approved - you can book, track and cancel courses from the convenience of your phone, tablet or computer. Our courses are currently taking place online. To access these, all you need is a tablet/smart phone or a PC.



We also offer education grants up to £300 for Open University modules, work related and non work related modules with specific bursaries for Open University modules, school support staff and care assistants. Find out more at [www.learning.unison.org.uk/financial-support](http://www.learning.unison.org.uk/financial-support).

## UNISON Welfare support – There For You

Please don't forget that if you are facing financial difficulties, UNISON's charity There For You might also be able to help - [www.unison.org.uk/get-help/services-support/there-for-you/](http://www.unison.org.uk/get-help/services-support/there-for-you/)

For more general benefit advice during the crisis see the dedicated COVID-19 Community Helpline: Freephone 0800 802 0020 / [covid19@adviceni.net](mailto:covid19@adviceni.net)



## Access UNISON support

- If you need support on specific issues in your workplace, please contact your branch rep. All contact details are listed on the branch pages of the website – [www.unison-ni.org.uk/branches.co.uk](http://www.unison-ni.org.uk/branches.co.uk)
- For general queries the regional office number remains the same – 02890270190.
- You can also email us on [UnisonNorthernIreland@unison.co.uk](mailto:UnisonNorthernIreland@unison.co.uk)

## Read more news from UNISON

Check out [www.unison-ni.org.uk/](http://www.unison-ni.org.uk/) to read more about what UNISON is doing for our education members at work and in the community.

You can also access our social media pages for regular updates including online courses, members meetings and advice. We have been running film nights; webinars; some branches run a weekly quiz... so stay connected and stay in touch!



[facebook.com/unison.northernireland/](https://facebook.com/unison.northernireland/)



[twitter.com/UNISONNI?lang=en](https://twitter.com/UNISONNI?lang=en)

The screenshot shows the UNISON News website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'Home' and 'News' tabs. The 'News' section is active, displaying several articles. The first article is titled 'UNISON sets out to recruit more safety reps amid COVID crisis' dated Wednesday 1 July 2020. Below it is 'RETURN TO WORK GUIDANCE FOR CHILDCARE MEMBERS' dated Thursday 25 June 2020. The third article is 'Ambulance staff in Northern Ireland to receive backdated pay boost, says UNISON' dated Wednesday 24 June 2020. On the left side, there's a sidebar menu with categories like 'Home', 'News', 'Campaigns', 'Health & Safety: Covid-19 - What you need to know', 'Join UNISON', 'Who's Who', 'Branches', 'Education and Training', 'Self-Organised / Special Interest Groups', 'Collective Bargaining with Employers', 'Equality and Human Rights', 'Partnerships', 'Membership Services', 'UNISON Jobs', and 'Contact Us'. At the bottom of the sidebar, there's a 'UNISON Wide News' section with a list of recent news items.



## Do you know someone who isn't a member of UNISON yet?

### Three simple ways to join UNISON today:



Join online at  
[joinunison.org](https://joinunison.org)



Call us on  
0800 171 2193



Ask your  
UNISON rep for an  
application form

Each of our 1.4 million members has their own reasons for joining UNISON. But every one receives our help and support – with membership costing less than you might think.

If you know someone who isn't a member yet, then pass on this newsletter and talk to them about the benefits of joining UNISON now.

You could both also win £100 by entering the recruitment draw below.

- **Support** - we'll be with you when you need it most
- **Legal Help** for you at work and your family at home
- **Financial Assistance** and debt advice in times of need
- **Compensation** for you & your family
- **Discounts** including money off cars and holidays
- **Helpline** - Our helpline is open until midnight weekdays, and 4pm on Saturdays, closed on Sundays
- **Training** to help develop your career

### Calling UNISON members - Recruit a Friend & win £100 each!

If you recruit a friend to become a UNISON member, you will both be entered into a prize draw to win a £100 gift voucher each! No limits. Recruit 5 friends and get 5 entries into the draw!

The competition will run from **1st July - 31st August 2020** with the draw taking place on Friday 4th September 2020

Applications must be received no later than **31st August 2020**.

To enter the competition, new members must either:

- complete an application form, write the full name of the person/friend who recruited you along the top, and return it to UNISON Galway House, Belfast; or
- join on-line and then send an email to [UnisonNorthernIreland@unison.co.uk](mailto:UnisonNorthernIreland@unison.co.uk). Title your email 'Prize Draw' and include your own name and the name of the person/friend who recruited you.