



PNiS/CC

15th May 2020

Dr Sharon McGuinness
CEO HSA
The Metropolitan Building
James Joyce Street
Dublin 1
D01 K0Y8

Via email: sharon_mcguinness@hsa.ie

Re: 'return to work safely' protocol

Dear Sharon

I refer to the recently developed '*return to work safely*' protocol and I wish to specifically raise issues with the Health and Safety Authority in relation to employees and workers who have remained at work during this pandemic, due to their role in frontline health care delivery.

Currently this virus is a significant and dangerous occupational health risk for Health Care Workers (HCW). The latest figures published on 10th May recorded 6,711 HCWs infected with the virus, representing 29.9% of all infections in this country and the highest recorded infection rate among HCWs in Europe. Five HCWs have lost their lives as a result of contracting the virus in the Republic of Ireland.

For information, I attach the letter of response, to specific questions we posed to the Chief Clinical officer of the HSE, in relation to the recording of incidents of occupationally acquired infections.

It is clear from this response that:

This is a very serious occupational hazard for health care workers;

Serious injury / illness requiring hospital admission resulted for 210 HCWs of which 72 were nurses. ICU admission and care has resulted for 34 HCWs and of those 14 or 41% were nurses.

This raises major health and safety concerns for HCWs, which is why we are now raising this as a formal issue. The INMO request that you assist us in getting answers from the HPSC and NPHE and insist that they report to your authority, incidents of occupational injury from this dangerous infection and any subsequent work-related deaths.

We request that the HSA seeks answers to the following queries:

- 1. Of the recorded infected HCWs how many of the infections are related to exposure at work?**

2. **At the time of exposure/injury via infection was Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) provided?**
3. **If so, was it appropriate and sufficient for their protection?**
4. **What risk assessment was carried out by the employer in relation to level of exposure and level of protection?**
5. **What risk reducing measures were introduced if any? (i.e. upgrading of PPE, engagement of additional staff to ensure frequent breaks from exposure, decontamination / shower facilities provided post exposure, etc)**
6. **What level of infection at work in health care facilities is occurring on a daily basis and why is this not recorded or reported?**
7. **As an occupationally acquired injury resulting in three days absence from work is reportable, what is the rationale for Covid 19 related absences from the workplace not been reported?**

It is our view that If a worker acquires an illness in the workplace, it must be reportable to the HSA, and must be examined by the HSA to identify how the injury/ illness was acquired and how future injury/infections can be prevented.

The current recording system prepared by the HPSC must therefore distinguish workplace infection from community non workplace infection in their reporting.

Furthermore, the HSA must insist that occupationally acquired Covid 19 infections must be reportable to the authority, to ensure accuracy in reporting and recording of the response by employers to prevent recurrence of such infections in each workplace.

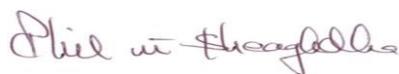
It is our view that If and when an injury at work occurs it should not matter what the underlying cause of the injury is, it should only matter that it occurred when the worker/ employee was engaged in the job they were employed to do.

In conclusion, we ask the HSA to examine each incident where HCW's have acquired Covid 19 in the workplace, to identify the causes, and to identify improvement in practices that will reduce future infections.

Please be advised that we have requested that the ICTU raise this issue with the Minister with responsibility for this area as a matter requiring urgent attention.

Thank you for your attention to this correspondence.

Is Mise



PHIL NÍ SHEAGHDHA
General Secretary