

Sean Holland  
Chief Social Work Officer  
Office of Social Services  
Department of Health  
Castle Buildings  
Stormont  
Belfast  
Northern Ireland  
BT4 3SQ

11/03/2020

Dear Sean

In light of the escalating spread of the COVID-19 virus in Northern Ireland I would be grateful if you could provide details of what advice has been provided by the Department of Health to social workers to:

- 1) Minimize the possibility of social workers becoming infected with coronavirus.
- 2) Limit the risk of transmission of the virus from staff who become infected to colleagues or service users.

Good social work practice is at its core relational and social workers spend significant amounts of time in face to face contact with service users. I am particularly concerned by the potential risk to BASW NI's members given the Public Health Agency (PHA) guidance for employers and businesses highlights infection is most likely to happen when there is close contact (within 2 metres or less) with an infected person and that risk of infection is likely to increase the longer someone has close contact with an infected person.

Unfortunately, the PHA guidance falls far short in terms of recognising the unique functions undertaken by social workers, most notably responsibilities regarding the care of looked after children in residential facilities. It is vital that guidance is provided detailing the appropriate response in the context of corona virus outbreak among service users safeguarded by statutory social work services.

I do not doubt the concerns of our members are shared by the Department of Health and I trust that if action has not yet been taken, it will be advanced as a priority, to ensure the risk to social workers is minimised.

Yours sincerely



**ORLAITH MCGIBBON**  
Chair, BASW Northern Ireland

Cc. Patricia Higgins.

Marie Roulston  
Director of Social Care and Children  
Health and Social Care Board  
12-22 Linenhall Street  
Belfast  
BT2 8BS

11/03/2020

Dear Marie

In light of the escalating spread of the COVID-19 virus in Northern Ireland I would be grateful if you could provide details of what advice has been provided by the Health and Social Care Board to social workers to:

- 1) Minimize the possibility of social workers becoming infected with coronavirus.
- 2) Limit the risk of transmission of the virus from staff who become infected to colleagues or service users.

Good social work practice is at its core relational and social workers spend significant amounts of time in face to face contact with service users. I am particularly concerned by the potential risk to BASW NI's members given the Public Health Agency (PHA) guidance for employers and businesses highlights infection is most likely to happen when there is close contact (within 2 metres or less) with an infected person and that risk of infection is likely to increase the longer someone has close contact with an infected person.

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I do not doubt the concerns of our members are shared by the Health and Social Care Board and I trust that if action has not yet been taken, it will be advanced as a priority, to ensure the risk to social workers is minimised.

Yours sincerely



**ORLAITH MCGIBBON**  
Chair, BASW Northern Ireland

Paul Morgan  
Chair  
Association of Executive Directors of Social Work  
Southern Health and Social Care Trust  
Edenderry House  
18 Gilford Road  
Portadown  
BT63 5ED

11/03/2020

Dear Paul

In light of the escalating spread of the COVID-19 virus in Northern Ireland I would be grateful if you could provide details of what advice has been provided by the Association of Executive Directors of Social Work to social workers to:

- 1) Minimize the possibility of social workers becoming infected with coronavirus.
- 2) Limit the risk of transmission of the virus from staff who become infected to colleagues or service users.

Good social work practice is at its core relational and social workers spend significant amounts of time in face to face contact with service users. I am particularly concerned by the potential risk to BASW NI's members given the Public Health Agency (PHA) guidance for employers and businesses highlights infection is most likely to happen when there is close contact (within 2 metres or less) with an infected person and that risk of infection is likely to increase the longer someone has close contact with an infected person.

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I do not doubt the concerns of our members are shared by the Association of Executive Directors of Social Work and I trust that if action has not yet been taken, it will be advanced as a priority, to ensure the risk to social workers is minimised.

Yours sincerely



**ORLAITH MCGIBBON**  
Chair, BASW Northern Ireland