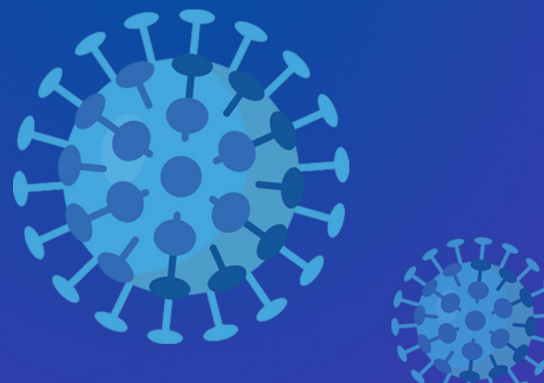


NOVEL CORONAVIRUS CLASSIFIED IN BIOLOGICAL AGENTS DIRECTIVE TO BETTER PROTECT HEALTH AND SAFETY OF WORKERS



3 June 2020
#Coronavirus

The EU has some of the world's highest standards for workers' health and safety protection. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission has been working on all fronts to support the health and safety of workers. As part of this work, the Commission has today updated the Biological Agents Directive to include SARS-CoV-2, the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19.

What is the Biological Agents Directive?

The Biological Agents Directive protects workers against exposure to viruses, bacteria, fungi and parasites, known as 'biological agents'.

Biological agents are classified into four risk groups, according to their level of risk of infection and the risk that it can cause disease in humans, the severity of the disease it causes, the ease with which the disease may spread, and the availability of effective treatment or prophylaxis (preventive measures).

How has the update been decided?

As part of the decision making process, and considering the latest available data on the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, experts from all Member States unanimously recommended a classification in group 3. The following criteria were considered relevant:



It can cause severe human disease and present a serious hazard to workers;



It may present a risk of spreading to the community;



There is usually effective prophylaxis available.

This decision was supported by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC). Social partners were also closely involved in this process through the tripartite Advisory Committee on Health and Safety at Work.



What does this mean for workers?

Employers need to assess all risks and put in place the necessary preventive and protective measures to minimise harm, for example via:



Work organisation

- Assess the risks •
- Avoid exposure if possible •
 - Minimise number of workers exposed •
- Keep records of workers exposed •
- Isolation and containment measures for suspected cases •



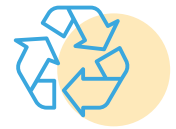
Information and training

- Information on risks, precautions and hygiene requirements •
- Initial and updated training •
- Use of biohazard and other relevant warning signs •



Hygiene and individual protection

- Appropriate hygiene measures •
- Appropriate protective clothing or equipment •
- No eating or drinking in areas at risk of contamination •



Other protective measures

- Safe handling of protective equipment and clothing •
- Safe collection, storage and disposal of waste •

Increased protection for workers in labs, industrial processes¹ and isolation facilities in health care

- Extract air must be filtered
- Surfaces such as the bench and floor must be impervious to water and easy to clean
- Surfaces must be resistant to acids, alkalis, solvents, disinfectants
- Access must be restricted to nominated workers only
- Personnel should wear protective clothing
- Decontamination and washing facilities should be provided
- Personnel should shower before leaving the contained area (recommended²)
- The workplace should be separated from any other activities in the same building (recommended²)
- Closed systems should be located within a controlled area
- The workplace should be maintained at an air pressure negative to atmosphere (recommended²)

1. In facilities that handle and manipulate samples of the virus, e.g. when producing a vaccine.

2. 'Recommended' means that the measures should in principle be applied, unless the results of the risk assessment indicate otherwise.

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