Care

Devastating Covid workplace death figures need immediate response

Almost a year on and workers still dying from occupational exposure

Almost a year on and workers are still dying from occupational exposure, says union

GMB, Britain's general union, has spoken out after ONS figures found that at least eight thousand working age deaths were linked to COVID-19 in England and Wales in 2020.

Workers in some occupations were much more likely to die than others, according to the new official figures.

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Dan Shears, GMB National Health, Safety and Environment Director

Those in low-paid occupations, hospitality, food and drink processing, transport, and healthcare roles were all at risk of a statistically significant elevated risk of dying.

Occupations with the highest number of COVID-19 linked deaths were (as classified by the ONS) care workers and home carers (347 deaths), taxi and cab drivers (213 deaths), sales and retail assistants (180 deaths), nurses (157 deaths), and cleaners and domestic workers (153 deaths).

GMB is campaigning for full provision of high-quality PPE, individualised risk assessments, a dramatic increase in poverty Statutory Sick Pay rates, and an urgent injection of resources into health and safety enforcement.

Dan Shears, GMB National Health, Safety and Environment Director, said:

"The deaths of eight thousand working age people is a devastating and bitter milestone that could have been avoided.

"The truth is that the UK was too slow to respond to the outbreak in workplaces. The messages from Ministers have been inconsistent, and to date there have been no prosecutions of employers for breaches of regulations relating to coronavirus.

"Workers are still being forced to use inadequate PPE, and some people are attending work despite being infectious because they cannot afford to self-isolate. These are structural problems that could have been fixed months ago.

"The time for action is now – Ministers and employers must urgently convene with workers' representatives to address the ongoing and needless risks in workplaces before more lives are lost."

Press office

Member requiring help?

GMB UNION

07958 156846

press.office@gmb.org.uk

Click to contact your local GMB Region

info@gmb.org.uk