REGULATION FOR STAFF IN AT-RISK GROUPS AND THE USE OF PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT DUE TO COVID-19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of document:</th>
<th>Regulation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date:</td>
<td>19 January 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reg. no:</td>
<td>FS 1.1-1461-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approved by:</td>
<td>Vice-Chancellor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validity:</td>
<td>19 January 2021 until further notice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field:</td>
<td>Human resources, equal opportunities and work environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office in charge:</td>
<td>Human Resources Office</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Contents

Regulation for staff in at-risk groups and the use of protective equipment due to COVID-19....1

1. Description ..................................................................................................................... 3
2. Background ................................................................................................................... 3
3. Staff in at-risk groups ................................................................................................. 3
   3.1. Handling worry and fear of infection ................................................................. 4
4. Protective equipment .................................................................................................. 5
1. Description

This document aims to guide managers at Umeå University in how to handle the members of staff who, according to the definition of the National Board of Health and Welfare, belong to at-risk groups for COVID-19, or staff who experience worry or fear of infection, as well as provide guidelines for protective equipment for members of staff and students.

This regulation is valid until further notice and will be revised if the Swedish Government decides to change their rules regarding sickness benefit for people in at-risk groups or benefits when you have close relatives in an at-risk group, or if the Public Health Agency of Sweden’s guidelines and general advice are changed.

2. Background

The National Board of Health and Welfare continuously redefines at-risk groups based upon the development of knowledge of COVID-19. An at-risk group are people who are at a higher risk for severe illness if they are infected with COVID-19. Members of staff can also experience varying levels of worry and fear of COVID-19.

The following regulation has also taken work environment perspectives into account. Due to the contents and nature of this document, aspects concerning sustainability, collaboration and accessibility have not been taken into account. Neither have student or international aspects. This document is not regarded to have any impacts on gender equality at Umeå University.

According to previous decisions, extensive restrictiveness must be taken regarding presence in University premises. When visits to our premises are deemed necessary, physical distancing between individuals must be adhered to. All members of staff must work from home to the extent possible and after consultation with their manager.

3. Staff in at-risk groups

If a member of staff is included in an at-risk group, according to the National Board of Health and Welfare’s definition, and has work tasks that require being present in university premises, the employer must investigate the opportunity for this member of staff to work from home or adapt the workplace to reduce the risk of infection.

A member of staff in an at-risk group must show a doctor’s certificate proving the reduction in working capacity. This certificate is also what forms basis for discussions. The individual member of staff has the responsibility to consult their doctor regarding what measures can be taken to reduce the risk of infection. In the case that a member of staff has no established contact with a doctor, the occupational health care services can also be used to assess at-risk groups.

Below is a description of the work process when a member of staff is deemed to belong to an at-risk group.

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1 The National Board of Health and Welfare’s report – Uppdatering av tidigare rapport gällande identifiering av riskgrupper som löper störst risk att drabbas av ett särskilt allvarligt sjukdomsförlopp vid insjuknande i covid-19.
1. The manager and the member of staff will reach an agreement for the member of staff to work fully or partially from home with tasks that can be carried out remotely.

2. The manager investigates the opportunities to adapt the work tasks and/or working hours so that the member of staff can maintain distance to others during their work.

3. The manager investigates the opportunities to offer other work tasks within the scope of the employment to enable the person to work fully or partially from home, or to allow the member of staff to maintain sufficient distance to others to avoid the spread of COVID-19.

4. If it is not possible to fully or partially make adaptations such as stated above, the member of staff can apply for preventive sickness benefit (förebyggande sjukpenning) from Försäkringskassan (the Swedish Social Insurance Agency).

   Benefits are granted on 25, 50, 75 or 100 per cent depending on what extent the member of staff is unable to work. No certificate from the employer is necessary. Instead, the member of staff certifies in the application that the employer cannot provide work from home or provide an adapted work situation to ensure sufficient distance to avoid infection.

   Employers can grant unpaid leave for a member of staff awaiting notice from Försäkringskassan and must then make salary deductions from the first day of absence. The decision from Försäkringskassan constitutes proof of the right of absence retroactively.

3.1. Handling worry and fear of infection

Worry or fear of being infected is not a valid cause to not perform your work tasks or being absent from the workplace, from a labour legislative perspective. However, worry and fear of being infected with COVID-19 has to be handled with respect and fact-based dialogue. To prevent and handle worry, it is important to set aside time to discuss how work can be conducted in the safest way possible. There may also be reason to discuss strategies for handling worries and creating an understanding for why people in a team react differently. For individual members of staff who have a need to discuss their worries, the occupational health care services, Feelgood, can be contacted.

In the case that a member of staff has a close relative in an at-risk group and the member of staff needs to take this into consideration, the member of staff and the manager should discuss the matter, in accordance with the procedures for staff in at-risk groups, and with regards to how work can be conducted in the safest way possible.

In some cases, a member of staff – who has a close relative in an at-risk group, and who has to refrain from working to avoid infecting the close relative – can be granted temporary benefits from Försäkringskassan. This is called disease carrier allowance (smittbärarpennning). To be eligible for disease carrier allowance, the member of staff must either work part-time as a personal assistant to the close relative or receive close relative benefits (närståendepenning) for the care of the close relative. Further information is available on the Swedish Social Insurance Agency’s (Försäkringskassan) website.
4. Protective equipment

Umeå University follows the Swedish Government’s and the Public Health Agency of Sweden’s regulations and guidelines regarding the use of protective equipment and the university does not recommend the use of protective equipment to a greater extent than what is recommended by those authorities. In their general guidelines, the Public Health Agency of Sweden states that in situations where it is difficult to avoid crowding and close contacts, using face masks or other protective equipment can be useful. Please note that when using protective equipment, the carrier must be informed of how the equipment is to be used correctly. The Public Health Agency’s guidelines must still be respected, such as staying at home in the event of illness and maintaining distance to others.

There is no legal foundation for demanding that students carry face masks in education that does not normally require protective equipment or clothing.

The university has a procured agreement for the purchase of certain protective equipment. Departments and offices that deem it necessary can purchases such protective equipment with the objective of increasing the sense of security or if needs arise to conduct certain tasks in which distance cannot be maintained.

Regarding disposal of single-use face masks or other disposable equipment used for non-medical purposes or in contexts where infection is not suspected, these can be thrown in regular waste baskets.

Students taking part in placements, clinical training or internships must follow the guidelines regarding protective equipment issued by the accountable authority, that is the school, hospital or health centre, for instance.