



To: The Managerial Authorities of Recognised Primary, Secondary, Community and Comprehensive Schools and the Chief Executives of Education and Training Boards

Re: (COVID-19): Arrangements for certain employees (i.e. School Secretaries, Caretakers, Cleaners, Bus Escorts) of recognised Primary and Post Primary schools in the Free Education Scheme and of ETBs

Date: 29 June 2021

The need for Staff to reapply for Categorisation as VHR

The purpose of this letter is to outline the approach to arrangements for staff (other than Teachers and SNAs) currently categorised as Very High Risk (VHR) ahead of the 2021/2022 school year, given the current position with regard to COVID-19.

Recent advice is that as our knowledge of COVID-19 has increased, some conditions that previously placed employees in the VHR category now place them in the high risk category or in some instances in the normal risk category. In addition, an employee's risk categorisation may now have changed due to vaccination and / or history of recent confirmed COVID infection.

We are awaiting latest public health on the approach to people at higher risk from COVID-19 in the workplace setting and we will update you as soon as possible thereafter. This will include clarifying the position around VHR staff who may wish to return to the workplace. For the moment the approach set out below should be undertaken by staff.

Staff categorised as VHR by the OHS

Where the Occupational Health Service (OHS) categorised an employee as VHR at any time before or during the 2020/21 school year under the process set out in Circulars 54/2020 or 21/2021 as appropriate, the COVID-19 Health Risk Categorisation Report will not be valid for the 2021/2022 school year. Existing COVID-19 Health Risk Categorisation Reports **will expire on 31 August 2021** and should be recorded as such by employers in the appropriate manner unless a new COVID-19 Health Risk Categorisation Report is provided by the employee.

In that regard any employee who is of the view that they are or remain at very high risk of serious illness from contracting COVID-19 (whether previously categorised or not) will need to make a new application for the 2021/2022 school year, as per the process set out in Circulars 54/2020 or 21/2021, as appropriate. **The application should be submitted to the OHS by the 30th July 2021.**



Employees over 70 Years of Age

Some employees are considered VHR on the basis that they are over 70 years of age and would not have needed to apply to the OHS for categorisation. Any employee over 70 who believes they have an underlying condition or other risk beyond solely age that would mean they may be considered VHR should now seek an assessment by the OHS under the process set out in Circulars 54/2020 or 21/2021 as appropriate ahead of the 2021/22 school year.

Future Potential Change to Health Advice

A change in HSE advice during the 2021/22 school year may result in a health risk re-categorisation for a VHR employee. Where there is a change in HSE advice for the higher risk groups, the OHS will contact the employee who submitted a COVID-19 Risk Assessment Questionnaire in respect of the 2021/22 school year, to invite them to re-submit a new Questionnaire.

In addition, in line with the ongoing updating of HSE advice or a change in the medical diagnosis, the COVID-19 Health Risk Categorisation Report may expire at any stage throughout the next school year, meaning the employee will be required to return to the workplace. In addition, where medical diagnosis changes, the employee must inform the employer immediately.

All queries should initially be brought to the attention of the employer who may wish to consult with their representative organisation.

Mark Bohan
Principal Officer
External Staff Relations

Tom Deegan
Principal Officer
Schools Financial

Shirley Kearney
Principal Officer
School Transport