

Benefits of First Responder Status for Food Workers

Our country's grocery, retail, pharmacy, and food processing workers are working tirelessly during this outbreak to ensure families get the food and supplies they need. We need these workers to stay healthy more than ever before and protecting them is essential to our communities and the food supply.

Policymakers should deem grocery store, pharmacy, and food processing workers eligible for "first responder" benefits to support the workers who are keeping food on the tables during this crisis.

Whatever your state may call them, food workers are front line workers and should get the benefits of first responder status regardless of how they are designated. As front-line workers, grocery store, pharmacy, and food processing workers who must work during the pandemic should be eligible for:

1) Free childcare while working

Congress passed a \$2 trillion economic rescue plan that will offer assistance to tens of millions of households affected by the coronavirus. One of the stimulus package components is \$3.5 billion to be distributed through the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) program, a federal assistance fund distributed to states to provide for childcare for low-income families. The stimulus bill lifts the income requirements to ensure that the CCDBG program covers people deemed essential to ongoing state operations during this crisis. Childcare is a necessity for many families, but especially for front-line workers who cannot help with this public health crisis without it.

2) Free health care coverage for all coronavirus treatments, tests, and medicines

Policymakers should ensure that food workers have access to coronavirus prevention, testing, and treatment they need regardless of cost considerations. Workers should not incur additional costs for doing what is recommended or required, including staying home from work or getting the tests and treatments they need. There should be government support for the expenses related to COVID-19 treatment and services provided by plans covering employees in industries supplying "essential services" (e.g. grocery and other food workers).

3) Free personal protective equipment.

All food workers should be provided the appropriate resources, training, equipment, and protocols to be protected from the virus and avoid infecting other people. Since there is no established safe exposure limit to the virus, the goal should be to eliminate exposure to the greatest extent possible.

4) Paid leave that covers testing, quarantine, isolation, medicine, and treatment resulting from COVID-19 for the worker and care for a family member, as well as sickness that may not be COVID-19 but could be indicative of symptoms related to COVID-19.

The spread of COVID-19 has highlighted the health and economic consequences faced by working people when they lack access to paid sick days and paid family and medical leave. Millions of workers face the devastating decision between risking their own health (and that of their families and communities) or risking the loss of a paycheck or job.

All working people who are sick, who are affected by quarantine orders or who are responsible for caring for children whose schools have been closed should have job protection and paid sick leave for a minimum of 14 days.

The Government Needs to Support Grocery Workers During the Pandemic

UFCW has trained, educated, and equipped our members with the tools they need to be safe on the job, but we are demanding additional urgent action to ensure employers implement comprehensive plans to protect front-line workers and reduce the risk of exposure to the general public.