

ACSH Working Party
Pandemic OSH related issues
First Opinion

Statement from the Workers Interest Group (WIG)

The WIG is of the view that the Biological Agents Directive (BAD) should be revised, taking into account the following:

- 1) Available data arising from the Sars-Cov-2 pandemic show that workers are being infected at work. Outbreaks and clusters of Covid-19 in a variety of occupational settings have been reported since the start of the pandemic.¹
- 2) The recent Covid-19 pandemic has shown that urgent measures are needed to protect workers from the impact of a transmission of infectious diseases. What the Covid-19 epidemic and earlier ones, like BSE and SARS, have also shown is that a broad range of occupations are concerned by such diseases. The scope of the BAD does not adequately cover all occupations (to be) affected by (future) pandemics. The fact that a wide range of occupations is considered at risk should be reflected in the Directive, to ensure that these are also included in the development and implementation of preventive measures in the relevant professions.²
- 3) The inclusion of a reference to vulnerable groups could be considered, as they may vary depending on the sector and the biological agent'.³
- 4) Research shows that classification of biological agents in practice is not in line with the legal provisions in the Directive (articles 2 and 18 of the BAD). One of the conclusions of this research is that a general principle seems to be for virulence to be given greater weight in the classification definitions compared to transmissibility and availability of treatment / vaccines.^{4 5} This raises the question whether a revision of the classification rules is needed. Since the occurrence of a pandemic has not been taken into account when designing the classification system, this is also an element to take into consideration.

¹ Agius, R. M. et al. (2020) Covid-19 in the workplace. BMJ 2020; 370:m3577. ECDC (2020) COVID-19 clusters and outbreaks in occupational settings in the EU/EEA and the UK

² Meima, M. et al. (2020) Biological agents and prevention of work-related diseases: a review. European Risk Observatory Report, EU OSHA.

³ Ibidem

⁴ Klein M.R. (2012) Classification of biological agents, RIVM letter report 205084002/2012, Bilthoven, National Institute for Public Health and the Environment.

⁵ ETUI (2020), Benchmarking Working Europe 2020, Covid 19 and the world of work, the impact of a pandemic. Chapter 5. Unger, J-P. (2020) Comparison of COVID-19 Health Risks with Other Viral Occupational Hazards. *International Journal of Health Services*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020731420946590>