



RECOMMENDED

Guide for  
healthy care  
workers

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## TOP STORY

# Wearing a mask is not a health hazard

## DGUV fact check on masks

In order to contain the corona pandemic, many companies and also some schools have made it compulsory to wear a mask. The German social accident insurance institutions have been fielding an increased number of enquiries regarding the use of masks. A significant reason for this increase has been the concern that wearing a mask could be detrimental to a person's health. The DGUV has clarified the most important facts.

In November, there was an increase in the number of enquiries received by the German social accident insurance institutions for the public and private sectors regarding the use of masks. This was partly triggered by a video that was distributed via social media channels that attributed statements about wearing masks to the DGUV which, in fact, it had not made.

"These kinds of claims cause a great deal of confusion among companies, employees, teaching staff, parents and students. They even endanger the health of the people we insure", said Dr Stefan Hussy, Director General of the DGUV. "Just to be very clear: the German social accident insurance institutions for the public and private sectors currently have no evidence to prove that wearing a fabric mask impairs breathing to a degree that is hazardous to health or could trigger CO<sub>2</sub> poisoning."

The DGUV initiated legal action in order to counter these false allegations. It has also responded with a series of public relations measures. This includes using various social networks to promote the wearing of masks.

The regulations on wearing a mask are described in the SARS-CoV-2 Occupational Safety and Health Standard published by the German Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. This states: "Irrespective of the company policy on temporary additional measures, in case of doubt where the minimum dis-

**UK|BG**

In Zeiten von Corona  
**WER GESICHT  
ZEIGEN WILL,  
TRÄGT MASKE.**

#Maske tragen

Photo source: DGUV

Working safely and healthily under pandemic conditions. Wearing a mask is an effective way to combat the coronavirus.

tance cannot be reliably maintained, mouth-and-nose covering must be provided and worn." Together with the other measures, masks are intended to support safe and healthy working even under pandemic conditions.

There have also been enquiries about how long a mask should be worn and how long the break from wearing a mask should be. In May, the DGUV published a statement produced by the Coordination Group for Biological Agents which offers guidance to employers.

During the corona pandemic, more and more people want to protect themselves with tested, certified respirators known as FFP2 masks. However, the media is now regularly reporting on counterfeit and defective FFP2 masks. The Institute for Occupational Safety and Health of the German Social Accident Insurance (IFA) recently published a poster showing how to recognise certified respiratory protection that is safe to use.

**Web:** [www.dguv.de/en](http://www.dguv.de/en) › **Webcode:** dp1318096  
(German only)

## FYI CORONA Information Portal

What do companies and educational institutions have to keep in mind at the moment? The DGUV Information Portal provides answers. It collects the latest information on pandemics and infection prevention and has links to specific guidance for various sectors, including the education sector.

**Web:** [www.dguv.de/corona](http://www.dguv.de/corona)  
(German only)



Photo source: Jan Rühl/DGUV

## Future Prospects

Dear Reader,

We are in the closing stages of a unique year. The usual retrospective and outlook just aren't enough to capture this year. The last months have been a challenge for everyone – privately and professionally. And there's still no major relief in sight. It is vital to monitor how the situation develops from week to week and how to react to it. Many people are concerned about this uncertainty, especially because the future is still so unclear.

As Germany's provider of social accident insurance, we want to make sure that people can work and learn in a healthy and safe way – even under pandemic conditions. In order to do this, the social accident insurance institutions for the public and private sectors have been talking with thousands of companies and educational institutions, providing reliable support through advice, information and clarification. This is being done on a highly individual basis which is tailored to the various sectors and educational institutions.

Even though the pandemic is ever-present, there are other important issues. So here is a brief look at the coming year: from day one of the new year there will be important changes to Book VII of the German Social Code entering into force, which affect the legislation on occupational diseases. You can read more about these changes in the interview opposite. There is also an anniversary coming up: 50 years of Germany's pupil accident insurance.

Stay healthy and start the New Year with courage and confidence!

**Dr Stefan Hussy**  
Director General of the DGUV

# “The health of insured persons is a precious asset”

As of 1 January 2021, various changes to Book VII of the German Social Code will enter into force that will affect the Law on Occupational Diseases. In the lead-up to the changes in the law, the German social accident insurance was actively involved in the process of refining the law by producing a white paper. In addition to embedding the Medical Expert Advisory Board as a statutory requirement and adopting measures for more transparency in research projects and research funding by the social accident insurance, the changes focus on removing the forced obligation to stop working as a prerequisite for official recognition of an occupational disease. DGUV Kompakt spoke with Jürgen Schulin, Deputy Managing Director of the German Social Accident Insurance Institution for the Foodstuffs and Catering Industry (BGN) about what this actually means for insured persons.

**Mr Schulin, what does the forced obligation to stop work actually mean and what impact does removing it have on the official recognition of an occupational disease?**

Put simply: If someone had a certain illness but didn't want to give up their hazardous job, they couldn't receive official recognition of an occupational disease on purely formal grounds, and consequently they would not receive a pension. Nevertheless, we did provide other benefits, and of course our insured persons were not left to fend for themselves. Let's look at two typical examples from the sectors covered by the BGN. The first example relates to allergic, obstructive respiratory diseases (BK 4301) such as “baker's asthma”. We have been able to put in place extensive personalised prevention measures together with the insured persons and their employers, but if an insured person continued to work with exposure to flour dust, official recognition of the occupational disease was previously not possible. The same applied to severe or recurrent skin diseases (BK 5101) if the harmful activity was not ceased. In the future, the focus will be on stepping up prevention activities and the active participation of the insured persons affected; in addition, the new regulation will also strengthen the self-determination and personal responsibility of insured persons.

**Being able to continue doing their job must be a huge relief for insured persons.**

**But they also have to stay healthy. How is that possible?**

The health of insured persons is a precious asset and is a major challenge for all concerned. We are currently adapting our comprehensive prevention programmes for allergic respiratory diseases and skin diseases to the new law, because legislators expect personalised prevention to be strengthened. In addition, they require us to provide comprehensive information to persons about the risks involved and to work towards the hazardous activity being stopped if the danger cannot be eliminated. After all, the risks aren't insignificant; for example, in cases of asthma and continued exposure to flour dust. At the beginning of personalised prevention, the insured person is faced with an individual life decision and the difficult process of weighing up medical risks with socio-economic or psychosocial factors. We will be there during this process in an advisory capacity. Next, targeted personalised prevention measures will be introduced, which will be geared to the person's individual health situation as well as to the industry-specific or job-specific situation in a company.

**Can you describe some actual examples from the BGN?**

At the start of the 1990s, we developed a comprehensive respiratory prevention programme for bakers that often accompanies



Photo source: BGN

As a result of abolishing the obligation to stop work, bakery employees suffering from illnesses such as “baker’s asthma” will no longer have to give up their jobs in order for their illness to be officially recognised as an occupational disease.

and supports insured persons with strong occupational ties until they leave that occupation. Since then, we have provided long-term assistance for around 2400 insured persons, about half of whom are in the programme. Following the STOP principle for occupational safety and health, operational measures to minimise allergens must be complemented with medical measures that employ appropriate asthma therapy. Awareness of common non-occupational allergies such as hay fever, house dust mites or animal hair allergies are just as important for successful prevention as is comprehensive training with the insured person.

#### **Insured persons are required to cooperate in these measures. Why?**

When an occupational disease is officially recognised, the insured person is entitled to the entire range of benefits provided by the social accident insurance system (injury benefits, medical treatment, pensions, etc.). If they continue to perform the hazardous activity, it is in the self-interest of the insured person to use the available options to prevent or at least minimise further damage to their health. Therefore, they are under the obligation to accept the preventive services and measures offered. However, participation is not a prerequisite for official recognition of an occupational disease or the provision of medical treatment. The obligation to cooperate must be individually proportionate and reasonable. It is important to provide comprehensive advice and information to the insured person on risks, possible protective measures and specific preventive measures. The majority of our

insured persons have already taken advantage of our prevention services.

#### **Abolishing the obligation to stop work as a prerequisite for official recognition of an occupational disease also affects cases retroactively back to 1997. What can those affected by this do?**

Any cases in question will be addressed automatically, so insured persons do not have to do anything; we are actively involved and have already identified the relevant cases. The persons concerned will be contacted in writing at the beginning of 2021. In cases of skin disease reported under the old law, where measures such as medical treatment are still underway, the cases will also be addressed automatically in the current processing. In existing cases where an occupational disease was not officially recognized in the past because the insured person did not stop performing the hazardous job, a review will be carried out to determine whether there are still health restrictions due to the disease in order to decide on possible entitlements to benefits. If all prerequisites are met, official recognition of these occupational diseases will occur from 1 January 2021. Benefits will be paid from this date at the earliest.

**Web:** [www.dguv.de](http://www.dguv.de) **Webcode:** dp1318104 (German only)



Photo source: BGN

**Jürgen Schulin**  
Deputy Managing Director of the German Social Accident Insurance Institution for the Foodstuffs and Catering Industry (BGN)

## **TOPIC**

# **Brexit and social security**

The United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the European Union (EU) is just around the corner. On 31 December 2020, the transitional period agreed to by both sides ends. Until then, existing social security agreements between the EU and the United Kingdom remain in place.

The European Council is continuing to pursue its objective to achieve the closest possible partnership with the United Kingdom. The Council has called on the UK Government to take the necessary steps to make an agreement possible. Despite this, the European Commission has been preparing for several weeks for the scenario of a no-deal Brexit at the end of the transition period. The Member States, the EU institutions and all stakeholders are being called upon to be prepared for the case of a non-agreement, as an extension of the transition period is no longer possible.

Bilateral talks between the EU and the United Kingdom have once again intensified. Regardless of what happens as the negotiation marathon ends, it is imperative to ensure that employees of German companies working in the United Kingdom will still have access to necessary medical treatment following a workplace accident after 31 December 2020. It is still unclear whether, and to what extent, work-related accidents and occupational illnesses involving persons such as migrant workers will be regulated in future relations between Germany and the UK. Instead of a bilateral agreement, Book VII of the German Social Code would apply, as it also covers foreign matters.

The German social accident insurance institutions and the DGUV’s Foreign Liaison Office (DVUA) can be contacted regarding any questions.

**Web:** [www.dguv.de](http://www.dguv.de) > **Webcode:** e40364



## Guide for healthy care workers



Photo source: iga

Web: [www.iga-info.de](http://www.iga-info.de) >  
Veröffentlichungen (German only)

The new iga guide on “Healthy Behaviour in the Care Sector” published by the Initiative for Health and Work (iga) provides practical tips and advice on how care workers can stay healthy. The new handbook focuses on the individual competences of care workers. What do care workers need to be able to do in order to protect their own health and safety? To find the answer to this question, the authors conducted interviews with employees in geriatric care on topics including general conditions, self-perception, and the opportunities and obstacles in everyday life. The result is a broad spectrum of measures covering the organisation of the company, as well as what managers and individuals need to do.

The iga Initiative is a collaboration between the Association of Company Health Insurance Funds (BKK Dachverband), the Federal Association of Local Health Insurance Funds (AOK-Bundesverband), the Association of Substitute Health Insurance Funds (vdek) and the German Social Accident Insurance (DGUV). Its aim is to promote a healthy working life.

### NEWS IN BRIEF

## Electric scooters: “Roll ohne Risiko” (Ride without Risk) is the rule

Can I ride an e-scooter on the pavement? Where can I park it and is it compulsory to wear a helmet? These are important questions, but not everyone who uses this new trendy means of transport knows the rules. This is the result of a survey conducted by the German Road Safety Council (DVR). Therefore, the DVR, with the support of the Federal Ministry of Transport and Digital Infrastructure and the DGUV, has launched the nationwide campaign “Roll ohne Risiko!” (Ride without Risk!) It provides information about relevant rules and points out the dangers and



consequences of violating these rules. In order to reach users directly, the DVR is cooperating with the four largest providers of e-scooter sharing schemes in Germany, who are fitting out their e-scooters with stickers and handlebar hangers which explain the rules using short texts and pictograms. The rules and messages are in both German and English to reach both the local population and international tourists.

Web: [www.dvr.de](http://www.dvr.de) > Prävention > Kampagnen (German only)



## Protection through proper ventilation

Properly ventilating on a regular basis can reduce the transmission of corona viruses. The **kommmit**mensch prevention campaign has published practical reminders in the form of window-handle hangers. These can be ordered for free from the DGUV website.

Web: [www.dguv.de](http://www.dguv.de) > Webcode: p021607

Photo source: luckybusiness – stock.adobe.com

### IMPORTANT DATES

Due to the current protective measures, all events and seminars hosted by the DGUV and its institutions have been postponed or cancelled.

For the latest information, visit:  
[www.dguv.de](http://www.dguv.de) > Webcode: d16654

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... initial and continuing vocational training courses on occupational safety and health were conducted by the German social accident insurance institutions in 2019.

Source: DGUV

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