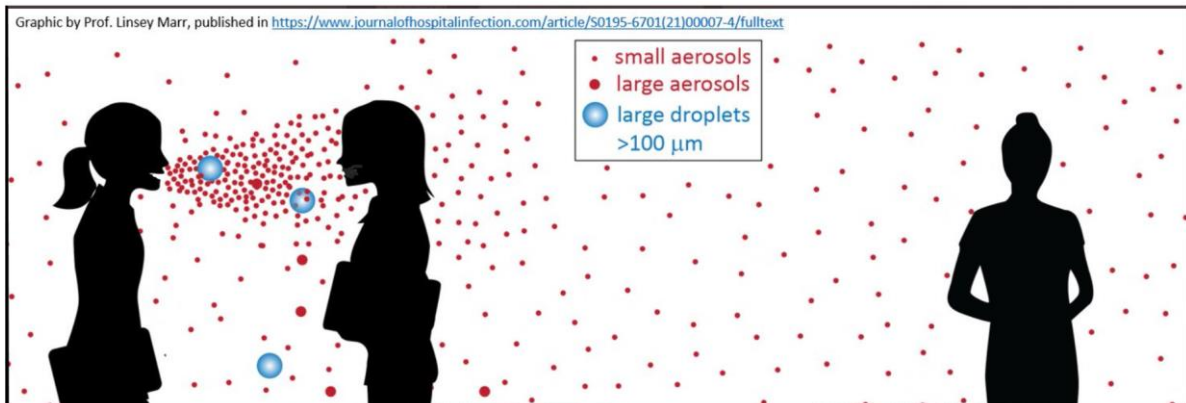


Covid-19 spreads **through the air** All workers need airborne protections now!



- Covid-19 continues to spread across the country with **hundreds of outbreaks occurring in workplaces each week**. The new variant, Omicron threatens to make this still worse.
- Workers are not being protected against the main way Covid-19 spreads – through the air - we breathe infected air into our lungs. **Handwashing and cleaning surfaces is not enough**.
- **Airborne protection measures are available**, are highly effective and work against all variants of Covid-19. Other measures, including vaccines, are essential but they will not stop the pandemic on their own.

1. FFP2 face masks. Workers need well-fitting masks that provide respiratory protection. These work very well. The blue “surgical masks” leak air and are not good enough



2. CO2 monitors should be provided to Health and Safety reps to check ventilation in the workplace.

3. Air filters should be installed in indoor areas where ventilation is poor - these are portable, not expensive and also work very well.

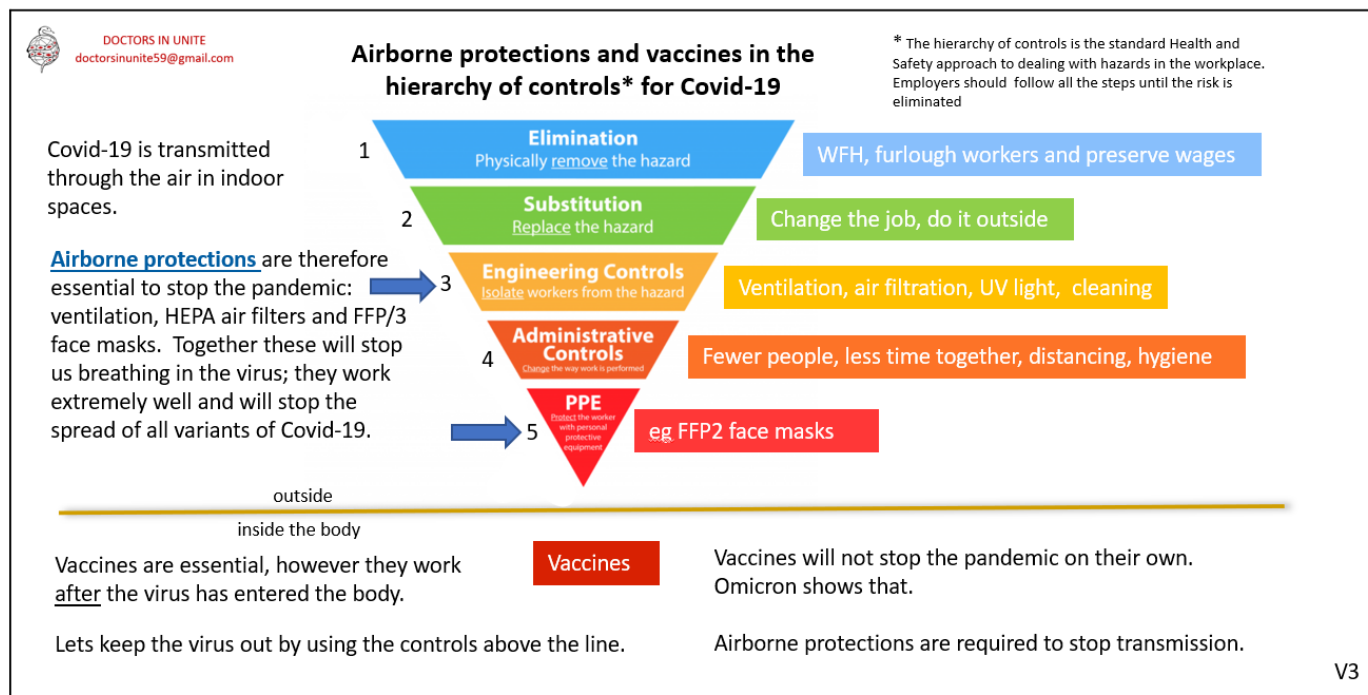
4. Ventilation systems in the workplace should be assessed and employers should have plans for improvements wherever needed.



* **If employers refuse to implement airborne protective measures, talk to your union.** Employers have a legal duty to provide safe working conditions, including clean air.



The hierarchy of controls is the standard way of dealing with any hazard in the workplace. Employers should ensure all steps are followed wherever possible. Engineering controls and PPE are essential because they remove virus from the air we breathe in. We have added vaccines to show that vaccines work after we have been infected; they are very important but they are not enough on their own to stop the pandemic. If we get rid of the virus from the air we breathe we will stop transmission.



Check list for Unite workplace representatives and activists

- Review of risk assessments – all risk assessments must now include ventilation and air quality in all areas of the workplace.**
- Does your employer provide of hand-held CO₂ monitors to Health and Safety reps to monitor ventilation, together with information and training. These are accurate and simple to use with some basic training.**
- Union Health & Safety reps should monitor ventilation and air quality and recommend the necessary improvements for management to implement.**
- Has your employer installed air filters in all poorly ventilated areas in the workplace, where ventilation cannot be sufficiently improved? These are highly efficient, inexpensive and readily available.**
- Provide all workers with FFP2 or FFP3 face masks if necessary and if workers need it with no questions asked. So called “surgical” masks leak at the sides and above the nose; they are not designed to protect against airborne spread. FFP2 and FFP3 masks provide respiratory protection and are highly effective. They are also cheap and readily available.**
- Ask your employer to set out plans to improve ventilation with fresh air in the medium term.**
- Many of these measures can be taken immediately and should not wait for ventilation systems to be installed. These measures should be taken together with others which are already Unite Health & Safety policy, including the “hierarchy of controls” as above.**

If a solution through your employers’ employment relations machinery does not materialise, contact your District or Regional Office to seek specialist health and safety or legal advice. They will advise about further action against employers who refuse to implement airborne protections in the workplace. We believe that airborne protections would be regarded as “reasonably practicable” under the 1974 Health and Safety at Work Act.