

Press release – Protection of workers from biological agents: how to classify COVID-19



On Wednesday afternoon from 15.00 – 16.00, Members of the Employment and Social Affairs Committee (EMPL) will debate with the Commission the [proposed classification](#) of the SARS-CoV-2 virus in risk category 3, the second most dangerous category of biological agents.

Parliament has the right to veto this measure, within one month after it has been adopted by the Commission, foreseen for the beginning of June.

Classification in risk group 3 means that the biological agent can “cause severe human disease and present a serious hazard to workers; it may present a risk of spreading to the community, but there is usually effective prophylaxis or treatment available”. The SARS and MERS viruses are examples of risk group 3 viruses. Ebola is in risk group 4.

EU [directives](#) protect workers against the risks of exposure to biological agents (bacteria, viruses and other micro-organisms) at work. Depending on their level of danger, they are classified in risk groups on an increasing scale from 1 to 4. Risk group 1 includes the least hazardous agents, group 4 lists the most hazardous ones.

Procedure: Regulatory procedure with scrutiny (RPS) – urgency procedure – [Rule 112\(4\)](#)

You can watch the meeting via [EP Live](#).

Background

The [Biological Agents Directive](#) lays down **minimum requirements for the health**

and safety of workers exposed to biological agents at work.

Biological agents are microorganisms that may harm workers by causing an infection, an allergic reaction or exposing them to a toxin. They are classified into four risk groups according to their level of **risk of infection**:

- **a group 1** biological agent is unlikely to cause human disease;
- **a group 2** biological agent can cause human disease and might be a hazard to workers; it is unlikely to spread to the community; there is usually effective prophylaxis or treatment available;
- **a group 3** biological agent can cause severe human disease and present a serious hazard to workers; it may present a risk of spreading to the community, but there is usually effective prophylaxis or treatment available;
- **a group 4** biological agent causes severe human disease and is a serious hazard to workers; it may present a high risk of spreading to the community; there is usually no effective prophylaxis or treatment available.

Follow the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs on [twitter](#)

Sign up to our [news subscription services](#)