

FACTSHEET: CORONAVIRUS

Issue Date: 16th March 2020 Issue 2

Source: UK Government

Today the government has announced new advice regarding the current pandemic. They have advised that we are now in the “fast growth period” and added that London is deemed to be slightly ahead of the rest of the UK in that growth.

They have announced three new guidance measures which have the aim to achieve two key objectives, at this stage the guidance is voluntary, but they will monitor the situation and have the powers in hand already to enforce this if needed:

- Delay the transmission
- Keep people safe

1. Persons showing symptoms

In any household where a member has the symptoms of Coronavirus, then all members of that household should self-isolate for 14 days.

2. Everybody without symptoms

- Stop non-essential contact and travel
- Work from home if possible
- Do not go out to pubs, clubs, restaurants or other gatherings

Mass gatherings where emergency services are required as part of the event management should be cancelled and will not be supported by the emergency services.

3. Vulnerable people

It is expected to be confirmed by the end of this week that the advice for vulnerable people will be to avoid contact with other for a period of 12 weeks.

Vulnerable people are deemed to be anyone of those listed below:

- over 70 years of age
- have an underlying health condition
- are pregnant
- have an immunity deficiency

Issue Date: 16th March 2020 Issue 1
Source: Public Health England

1. Background and scope of guidance

This guidance will assist employers and businesses in providing advice to staff on:

- the novel coronavirus, COVID-19
- how to help prevent spread of all respiratory infections including COVID-19
- what to do if someone with suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 has been in a workplace setting
- what advice to give to individuals who have travelled to specific areas, as outlined by the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) (full list is available here)
- advice for the certification of absence from work resulting from COVID-19

2. Information about the virus

A coronavirus is a type of virus. As a group, coronaviruses are common across the world. COVID-19 is a new strain of coronavirus first identified in Wuhan City, China in January 2020.

The incubation period of COVID-19 is between 2 to 14 days. This means that if a person remains well 14 days after contact with someone with confirmed coronavirus, they have not been infected.

3. Signs and symptoms of COVID-19

The following symptoms may develop in the 14 days after exposure to someone who has COVID-19 infection:

- cough
- difficulty in breathing
- fever

Generally, these infections can cause more severe symptoms in people with weakened immune systems, older people, and those with long-term conditions like diabetes, cancer and chronic lung disease.

4. How COVID-19 is spread

From what we know about other coronaviruses, spread of COVID-19 is most likely to happen when there is close contact (within 2 metres or less) with an infected person. It is likely that the risk increases the longer someone has close contact with an infected person.

Respiratory secretions produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes containing the virus are most likely to be the main means of transmission.

There are 2 main routes by which people can spread COVID-19:

infection can be spread to people who are nearby (within 2 metres) or possibly could be inhaled into the lungs.

it is also possible that someone may become infected by touching a surface, object or the hand of an infected person that has been contaminated with respiratory secretions and then touching their own mouth, nose, or eyes (such as touching door knob or shaking hands then touching own face)

There is currently little evidence that people who are without symptoms are infectious to others.

5. Preventing spread of infection

There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19. The best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to the virus.

Public Health England (PHE) recommends that the following general cold and flu precautions are taken to help prevent people from catching and spreading COVID-19:

- cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when you cough or sneeze.
- put used tissues in the bin straight away
- wash your hands with soap and water often – use hand sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available.
- try to avoid close contact with people who are unwell
- clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces
- do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean

If you are worried about symptoms, please call NHS 111. Do not go directly to your GP or other healthcare environment.

Further information is available on the PHE blog and NHS.UK.

Face masks for the general public are not recommended to protect from infection, as there is no evidence of benefit from their use outside healthcare environments.

6. How long the virus can survive

How long any respiratory virus survives will depend on a number of factors, for example:

- what surface the virus is on
- whether it is exposed to sunlight
- differences in temperature and humidity
- exposure to cleaning products

Under most circumstances, the amount of infectious virus on any contaminated surfaces is likely to have decreased significantly by 72 hours.

We know that similar viruses are transferred to and by people's hands. Therefore, regular hand hygiene and cleaning of frequently touched surfaces will help to reduce the risk of infection.

7. Guidance on facemasks

Employees are not recommended to wear facemasks (also known as surgical masks or respirators) to protect against the virus. Facemasks are only recommended to be worn by symptomatic individuals (advised by a healthcare worker) to reduce the risk of transmitting the infection to other people.

PHE recommends that the best way to reduce any risk of infection is good hygiene and avoiding direct or close contact (closer than 2 metres) with any potentially infected person.

Any member of staff who deals with members of the public from behind a full screen will be protected from airborne particles.

8. What to do if an employee or a member of the public becomes unwell and believe they have been exposed to COVID-19

If the person has not been to specified areas in the last 14 days, then normal practice should continue.

If someone becomes unwell in the workplace and has travelled to China or other affected countries, the unwell person should be removed to an area which is at least 2 metres away from other people. If possible find a room or area where they can be isolated behind a closed door, such as a staff office. If it is possible to open a window, do so for ventilation.

The individual who is unwell should call NHS 111 from their mobile, or 999 if an emergency (if they are seriously ill or injured or their life is at risk) and explain which country they have returned from in the last 14 days and outline their current symptoms.

Whilst they wait for advice from NHS 111 or an ambulance to arrive, they should remain at least 2 metres from other people. They should avoid touching people, surfaces and objects and be advised to cover their mouth and nose with a disposable tissue when they cough or sneeze and put the tissue in a bag or pocket then throw the tissue in the bin. If they don't have any tissues available, they should cough and sneeze into the crook of their elbow.

If they need to go to the bathroom whilst waiting for medical assistance, they should use a separate bathroom if available.

9. Returning from travel overseas to affected areas

Advice has recently changed for what to do if you have returned in the last 14 days from specified countries or areas which is being updated on an ongoing basis. The advice now is to self-isolate for 14 days if you believe that you may have been in contact with a confirmed case. If you believe that you may have the symptoms, then self-isolate for 7 days. In both cases you should contact the NHS on 111 to inform them and to take any further advice specific to your case.

With regards to travel information to other countries outside the UK, we recommend following the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) country advice.

10. What to do if a member of staff or the public with suspected COVID-19 has recently been in your workplace

For contacts of a suspected case in the workplace, no restrictions or special control measures are required while laboratory test results for COVID19 are awaited. In particular, there is no need to close the workplace or send other staff home at this point. Most possible cases turn out to be negative. Therefore, until the outcome of test results is known there is no action that the workplace needs to take.

11. What to do if a member of staff or the public with confirmed COVID-19 has recently been in your workplace

Closure of the workplace is not recommended.

The management team of the office or workplace will be contacted by the PHE local Health Protection Team to discuss the case, identify people who have been in contact with them and advise on any actions or precautions that should be taken.

A risk assessment of each setting will be undertaken by the Health Protection Team with the lead responsible person. Advice on the management of staff and members of the public will be based on this assessment.

The Health Protection Team will also be in contact with the case directly to advise on isolation and identifying other contacts and will be in touch with any contacts of the case to provide them with appropriate advice.

Advice on cleaning of communal areas such as offices or toilets will be given by the Health Protection Team. and is outlined later in this document.

12. When individuals in the workplace have had contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19

If a confirmed case is identified in your workplace, the local Health Protection Team will provide the relevant staff with advice. These staff include:

- any employee in close face-to-face or touching contact
- talking with or being coughed on for any length of time while the employee was symptomatic
- anyone who has cleaned up any bodily fluids
- close friendship groups or workgroups
- any employee living in the same household as a confirmed case

Contacts are not considered cases and if they are well they are very unlikely to have spread the infection to others:

- those who have had close contact will be asked to stay at home for 14 days from the last time they had contact with the confirmed case and follow the home isolation advice sheet
- they will be actively followed up by the Health Protection Team
- if they develop new symptoms or their existing symptoms worsen within their 14-day observation period they should call NHS 111 for reassessment
- if they become unwell with cough, fever or shortness of breath they will be tested for COVID-19
- if they are unwell at any time within their 14-day observation period and they test positive for COVID-19 they will become a confirmed case and will be treated for the infection

Staff who have not had close contact with the original confirmed case do not need to take any precautions and can continue to attend work.

13. Certifying absence from work

By law, medical evidence is not required for the first 7 days of sickness. After 7 days, it is for the employer to determine what evidence they require, if any, from the employee. This does not need to be fit note (Med 3 form) issued by a GP or other doctor.

Your employee will be advised to isolate themselves and not to work in contact with other people by NHS 111 or PHE if they are a carrier of, or have been in contact with, an infectious or contagious disease, such as COVID-19.

We strongly suggest that employers use their discretion around the need for medical evidence for a period of absence where an employee is advised to stay at home due to suspected COVID-19, in accordance with the public health advice being issued by the government.

14. Handling post, packages or food from affected areas

Employees should continue to follow existing risk assessments and safe systems of work. There is no perceived increase in risk for handling post or freight from specified areas.

15. Cleaning offices and public spaces where there are suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19

Coronavirus symptoms are similar to a flu-like illness and include cough, fever, or shortness of breath. Once symptomatic, all surfaces that the person has come into contact with must be cleaned including:

- all surfaces and objects which are visibly contaminated with body fluids
- all potentially contaminated high-contact areas such as toilets, door handles, telephones

Public areas where a symptomatic individual has passed through and spent minimal time in (such as corridors) but which are not visibly contaminated with body fluids do not need to be specially cleaned and disinfected.

If a person becomes ill in a shared space, these should be cleaned using disposable cloths and household detergents, according to current recommended workplace legislation and practice.

16. Rubbish disposal, including tissues

All waste that has been in contact with the individual, including used tissues, and masks if used, should be put in a plastic rubbish bag and tied when full. The plastic bag should then be placed in a second bin bag and tied. It should be put in a safe place and marked for storage until the result is available. If the individual tests negative, this can be put in the normal waste.

Should the individual test positive, you will be instructed what to do with the waste.

17. Stay at home guidance

This advice is for people with symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19), including those with a diagnosis of coronavirus (COVID-19) infection, who must remain at home until they are well.

The main messages are:

- if you have symptoms of coronavirus infection (COVID-19), however mild, do not leave your home for 7 days from when your symptoms started
- this action will help protect others in your community while you are infectious
- plan ahead and ask others for help to ensure you can successfully stay at home
- ask your employer, friends and family to help you to get the things you need to stay at home
- stay at least 2 metres (about 3 steps) away from other people in your home whenever possible
- sleep alone, if possible
- wash your hands regularly for 20 seconds, each time using soap and water, or use hand sanitiser
- stay away from vulnerable individuals, such as the elderly and those with underlying health conditions, as much as possible
- you do not need to call NHS 111 to go into self-isolation. If your symptoms worsen during home isolation or are no better after 7 days, contact NHS 111 online. If you have no internet access, call NHS 111. For a medical emergency dial 999

Clarification on self-isolation

7-day isolation

if you have symptoms of coronavirus infection (COVID-19), however mild, do not leave your home for 7 days from when your symptoms started.

- a high temperature
- a new continuous cough

This will help to protect others in your community while you are infectious.

Do not go to a GP surgery, pharmacy or hospital.

You do not need to contact NHS 111 to tell them you're staying at home.

14-day isolation

Those who have had close contact with either a suspected or confirmed case should stay at home for 14 days from the last time they had contact with the individual.

Specific Carlisle Support Services information for employees

If an employee has a confirmed case of Coronavirus

Employees will get statutory sick pay from the first day off work, not the fourth, to help contain coronavirus. If an employee informs us that they have been confirmed as having contracted Coronavirus, HR **must** be informed, giving full details of the employee, information on advice given and by whom and an expected return date. **SSP cannot be expected to be paid if the relevant department is not made aware.**

You should then immediately consult with your line manager with regard to notifying your client if you have been in work on a clients site.

Employees who self-isolate

Our normal sickness absence and pay policy will apply to employees who have to self-isolate, or have had to go into quarantine, including the temporary extension rules on SSP. Alternatively, there will be the option of taking paid annual leave. Annual leave will only be granted up to the employees current holiday entitlement.

Should an employee inform us that they have been advised to self-isolate, then we **must** ensure that this is logged with the HR department who will keep a database of such employees. It is vitally important to remember that any employee who has been told to self-isolate, should not be rostered for shift until that isolation period is over. As per the normal procedures, a return to work interview will be conducted with returning employees.

Employees who act as carers

There is no obligation to pay an employee who is not sick but cannot come to work because they have childcare/carer responsibilities due to the Coronavirus outbreak. However, we will consider each case on its merits and consideration may be given to offer the employee the option of taking paid annual leave.

Employees who refuse to come to work due to concerns

If an employee is worried about catching the virus and so refuses to attend work, we would listen to the employee's concerns and offer reassurance. Our response to this will depend on the actual risk of catching the virus at work. It will be different for every employee and will depend on specific circumstances including whether anyone in the workforce has already been diagnosed or there is another real risk of exposure. We may decide to offer a period of paid annual leave or unpaid leave, or allow the employee to work from home where this is feasible. Our response will be reasonable to the specific situation.

Discrimination, bullying and harassment

Coronavirus is not a reason to treat employees differently because of their national origin. Placing extra obligations on individuals (more robust hygiene methods, for example) places the company at risk of a claim of race discrimination. Extra hygiene measures, if we decide to implement them, will be required of all employees.

You should be alert to "banter", or more serious instances of harassment, between employees about the virus which relates to someone's nationality or ethnicity and ensure that your zero-tolerance stance to harassment is maintained and any such incidents are reported directly to your line manager.

Employees planning to travel abroad

Employees may have pre-booked annual leave to countries which have a high number of cases and you may be concerned that they pose a risk of picking up the virus and exposing the rest of the workforce to it. We cannot force employees not to travel and employees may not be inclined to cancel their plans if it means they may miss an important family event or will incur any financial issues. Employees will be encouraged to maintain good hygiene whilst travelling and pay attention to any signs of ill health and to also follow the Foreign & Commonwealth Office travel advice. Whilst we can cancel annual leave that has already been requested and authorised, this may not be good for employee relations and we will never consider so without a clear justification.

Closure of business premises

In the event that we are forced to close one of our offices due to a confirmed case of Coronavirus, employees will be asked to temporarily work from home if possible, to do so, equipment would be provided for this if necessary. We envisage that this should only be for about one day whilst our Cleaning division carry out a full deep clean of that office. Should there be a reoccurrence at that location, then a decision will be taken at that moment in time to determine whether to temporarily close the office or go through the deep cleaning process again.

Closure of schools

If schools or nurseries close due to suspected or actual cases of the virus, employees must notify us if they are unable to attend work due to a breakdown in their usual childcare arrangements. In this case, as in others where a child is unable to attend school due to closure, so the employee must remain at home to look after them, normal rules on unpaid time off for dependents will apply but as mentioned earlier we would consider to offer the employee the option of taking paid annual leave.

Employees who are laid off work

Some of our contracts will be affected by the Government advice to shut down activities such as sporting events and large indoor events. We have a responsibility to contracted employees to attempt to find them alternative work. In the case where this is not feasible, holiday pay may be granted up to the employees current entitlement value.

UK Government Coronavirus support for employees,

To make sure people in work can take the necessary time off to stay at home if they are suffering from coronavirus or to prevent its spread, changes have been made to Statutory Sick Pay and how Universal Credit supports self-employed claimants.

This includes:

- people who cannot work due to coronavirus and are eligible for Statutory Sick Pay will get it from day one, rather than from the fourth day of their illness – we intend to legislate so this measure applies retrospectively from 13 March 2020
- Statutory Sick Pay will be payable to people who are staying at home on government advice, not just those who are infected, from 13 March 2020 after regulations were laid on 12 March 2020 – employers are urged to use their discretion about what evidence, if any, they ask for

- if employees need to provide evidence to their employer that they need to stay at home due to coronavirus, they will be able to get it from the NHS 111 Online instead of having to get a fit note from their doctor – this is currently under development and will be made available soon
- self-employed claimants on Universal Credit who are required to stay at home or are ill as a result of coronavirus will not have a Minimum Income Floor (an assumed level of income) applied for a period of time while affected