

# Coronavirus (COVID-19) – Guidance for services, staff and volunteers

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March 17<sup>th</sup> 2020

We understand this is an extremely difficult and uncertain time, and would like to thank you for all your consideration to colleagues and clients, and for your continued commitment to our vital work.

Our primary concern is to keep all staff, volunteers and service users safe and well, and to be as supportive as we can, given the exceptional circumstances surrounding Covid-19.

This is a dynamic situation and, as such, plans will change according to new information and advice. We will update you accordingly and will review our approach in accordance with new information from Public Health England (PHE).

## General information

Coronavirus is a type of virus. As a group, coronaviruses are common across the world. Covid-19 is a new strain of coronavirus and was first discovered in January.

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 contracted the virus.

Evidence suggests that Covid-19 will lead to more deaths than similar viruses as the human body has not developed anti-bodies against it. Whilst anyone can become infected with the virus, people over the age of 70 and those with existing health conditions are most at risk of serious illness or fatality with death rates amongst these groups reaching between 2-3%. Children and young people are less at risk of contracting the disease and of being seriously affected by it.

The virus will place health systems, hospitals and social care under immense strain and because of this it is vital that each of us plays a part in helping prevent its spread. We can do so by taking the steps that are identified in this guidance.

In addition to measures at work, please consider actions that you can take in your personal life to reduce risks of infection.

## Symptoms

Symptoms include fever, a persistent cough and aches. For many people the symptoms will be mild and others may develop no symptoms at all. For more information please visit: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

## Preventative measures

### Practical advice

These measures are not exhaustive and, if you have any additional ideas about how we can prevent the spread of the virus, please speak with your manager about these.

**Please note that this is a rapidly changing environment and some of this advice might change at short notice.**

### All

- All staff, visitors and residents should be encouraged to wash their hands when entering and leaving our refuges and community offices.
- Please adopt a strict cleaning regime – including computers and phones.
- Adopt social distancing – observe a one-metre distance from others wherever possible.
- Avoid unnecessary travel and appointments. For example, if you had planned to travel on public transport to meet a colleague, replace this with a phone call using Skype / Team facility.
- Do not book onto or arrange training / events for the next six weeks. Existing arrangements should be honoured wherever possible. If you have concerns, please discuss these with your manager.
- Please consider whether you can help should you become short staffed in any of the projects or teams and let your manager know if you are able to work additional hours. Please think about whether you could cover absences in teams where you are not normally based.
- Ensure that you have your manager's mobile phone number and email saved or written down so that you can easily make contact in the event of an emergency.

- Report to your manager immediately if you are unable to carry out your out of hours on-call rota or helpline duties due to illness so that they can arrange cover. All up to date contact details are also recorded on OASIS.
- Report to your manager if you have recently returned from an at-risk area.
- Report to your manager if you have symptoms of the virus.
- Report to your manager if anyone you have supported / been in personal contact with has been advised to self-isolate or has tested positive for the virus.
- Please speak with your manager about any underlying health condition you (or someone who depends on you) have so that you can be best supported.

### **Additional measures – community services**

- Face to face appointments should, wherever possible, be conducted in an office or community venue. This will help ensure that you have access to hand washing facilities and are more able to apply social distancing.
- Also consider whether some appointments can be completed via the telephone, Teams or WhatsApp.
- There may be some cases where a home visit is essential – e.g. to provide Sanctuary measures or for an urgent joint visit. In these cases, please follow previous advice about hygiene and social distancing. If in doubt, seek the advice of your manager.
- Prior to an appointment, please check that the client does not have any symptoms of the virus.
- Update each clients' safety plan, paying particular attention to what self-isolation might mean for certain people – i.e. some people may be in situations where they are self-isolating with a perpetrator.
- Rearrange all non-essential agency meetings and/or conduct these via Teams / WhatsApp / telephone.
- Follow additional advice relating to attendance at core group meetings, MARACs etc.
- If you are carrying out group work sessions, please arrange these in suitable venues that allow for social distancing. If you cannot achieve this, please cancel the group and arrange alternative support.
- From **w/c 23rd March**, some members have advised that they will start phasing out face to face appointments. From the 30th of March it is highly likely that we will require all non-essential support appointments to be carried out in other ways e.g. via telephone, email, Teams or WhatsApp.

- From **w/c 30th March** all groups, drop-ins and coffee mornings will be halted. Please arrange to provide support for any clients attending these sessions via phone / Teams / WhatsApp / social media etc. We are also exploring options for providing group chats via closed Facebook groups and will provide an update on this.

### **Specific advice for refuge workers**

- You are key in helping keep the refuge safe and infection free. Please strictly observe all the advice provided and try to ensure that residents do the same.
- Flag to your manager if you are aware of anyone living in the refuge / dispersed accommodation who has additional vulnerabilities – e.g. if they are over the age of 70 and / or have relevant pre-existing health conditions. Alternative support / accommodation arrangements may be needed in these cases.
- Ask additional screening questions when taking referrals including finding out whether anyone in the family needing space has symptoms and/or whether they've been in contact with someone who has symptoms or has the virus.
- Seek management advice before accepting referrals into the refuge.
- If you cannot accommodate a family referred to the refuge speak with your manager about putting in place alternative arrangements to meet the family's needs. This may include accommodating someone in a hotel or organising urgent Sanctuary measures.

### **Additional information for managers**

- It is your responsibility to ensure that all the operational, practical measures outlined are acted upon in the local teams. Please ensure that staff and volunteers have access to updates, training and resources as needed.
- Ensure that PHE posters are displayed at all community / refuge venues.
- Below, we've provided specific advice around HR issues including leave and pay. Please record any HR decisions you make, including the reasoning for the decision.
- Please update and seek immediate advice from the senior team if you are supporting / or a member of staff has symptoms or is tested positive for the virus.
- Develop individual plans for dealing with self-isolation / coronavirus cases in the refuge. We have provided advice on this area of work in our contingency plans but these need to be adapted for individual facilities. The senior leadership team

will also support you and individual refuge teams to develop plans to manage instances of self-isolation / infection.

- Develop localised contingency plans to deal with potential staffing shortages, including finding out which team members are available to work overtime and at short notice. Overtime can be either be paid at hourly rate or accrued as TOIL.

### **Other alternatives/suggestions, one of our members has:**

Establish additional emergency funding to pay for hotels, travel, Air BnB;

- For people escaping abuse where this funding cannot quickly be accessed elsewhere.
- Extended paid emergency leave from 2 to 5 days in the event of, for example, school closure to allow you time to make alternative child-care arrangements.
- Enhanced sick pay arrangements.
- Will continue to update advice to all staff, including keeping options for home working under review.
- Additionally, for senior teams to maintain regular contact with commissioners, local public health teams and the police and update advice to the teams accordingly.

### **Home Working**

You may not be able to continue to provide the same levels of support if you implement a policy of persistent home working across the teams. We also know that it is beneficial for practitioners to be based within supportive teams rather than in isolation whilst carrying out case work. Therefore, at present and in line with government advice, you may not implement home working across teams. However, from **w/c 23rd March**, members have advised that they will be making arrangements for all infrastructure staff (admin, finance, comms, and volunteer organisers) to work from home.

If you have a specific reason for working from home, please discuss your circumstances with your manager.

We will continue to keep this situation under review and will follow government and public health advice.

In preparedness for home working or self-isolation please consider how you would access your laptop if you urgently needed to work from home.

## **Leave, pay and self-isolation**

Advice on working arrangements, leave and pay, wherever possible you can use your existing policies and procedures to manage leave.

If you have previously used your company sick pay or leave entitlement or are still in your probationary period we may use our discretion to pay sick pay under the limited circumstances as outlined below. We are taking this measure on compassionate grounds and to help prevent the spread of the virus and will keep the situation under review.

## **Travel outside of the UK for work or holidays**

Please consider the impact of authorising any travel outside of the UK for work and advise all staff due to travel overseas on holiday to check the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) website for up to date information.

You should consider your personal travel plans, including the possibility of new travel restrictions or disruptions, any self-isolation requirements, and the impact this may have on your ability to work after you return to the UK.

## **Process for self-isolation if not unwell**

Please inform your manager if you are isolating in accordance with the PHE advice relating to travel or contact with an infected person. You should provide evidence such as travel documents (if requested) to ensure that appropriate support is provided, arrangements are put in place and you are paid appropriately.

You should contact your manager emailing or calling them to explain your circumstances, attaching any evidence. Your manager will agree with you what work, if any, can be delivered or done remotely and ensure you have the necessary support to do so.

You may be asked to undertake alternative duties which are suitable for remote working. Where you are working from home, you can agree how best to provide the support and supervision needs.

If your manager confirms you are unable to work from home, you will be placed on paid leave for the period of your self-isolation (up to 14 calendar days). This will either be sick leave or annual leave depending on your individual circumstances.

If your manager confirms that you can work remotely whilst self-isolating but you choose not to, you may be expected to take annual leave or unpaid leave.

Should you become ill during the period of self-isolation you should follow NHS guidance and also advise your manager. You will be recorded as absent on sick leave from your first day of feeling unwell.

You are required to keep in contact with your manager during your period of self-isolation and to return to work after the period if you are fit and well (see section on returning to work).

### **Overseas and unable to return**

You must contact your manager to inform them of your circumstances. We recognise that you will be unable to do any remote working if unable to return from overseas, so you can be placed on paid leave for the period that you are unable to return (up to 14 calendar days). For as long as you are prevented from returning to the UK by government restrictions, the above arrangements will apply (to be reviewed if the situation continues beyond 14 calendar days). Please keep your manager updated regularly.

### **Illness**

Should you require any medical help or advice relating to suspected illness arising from coronavirus, you should contact NHS 111 and follow their advice. You can use your usual staff sickness absence policies and pay entitlements apply to any member of staff who is unwell due to coronavirus, the exceptions being that to prevent the spread of infection, staff who are required to self-isolate based on advice from NHS 111 will not need to produce a Fit Note in the timescales outlined in our policies (based on current Public Health England (PHE) advice).

If you become unwell while at work, you should immediately advise your manager, return home and contact the NHS on 111 for medical advice if you suspect it is

Coronavirus related. You will be recorded as absent on sick leave from your first day of feeling unwell.

**As of 13 March 2020, if you have a new continuous persistent cough or a fever then STAY AT HOME FOR 7 DAYS (you will get sick pay as outlined above). Always follow 111 advice and alert management of symptoms.**

### **Nursery and school closures**

If you require a short period of leave to cover childcare while you put arrangements in place following the closure of your child's nursery or primary school, you should notify your manager and you may be entitled to take some paid leave while you make alternative arrangements. If your child's nursery or primary school has closed as a precaution but there is no advice from PHE/NHS that children should self-isolate, you would be required to attend work as normal once arrangements for care are in place. As is normal practice and specifically given the current circumstances, it is not appropriate for staff to bring children to work.

If your child is required to self-isolate, you may be advised PHE/NHS not to attend work (i.e. self-isolate) and in these circumstances:

- Your manager will agree with you what work, if any, can be delivered remotely and ensure you have the necessary support to do so. You may be asked to undertake alternative duties which are suitable for remote working.
- If your manager confirms you are unable to work from home in any way, you may be placed on paid leave for the period of self-isolation (up to 14 calendar days).
- If your manager confirms that you can work remotely whilst self-isolating but you choose not to, you may be expected to take annual leave or unpaid leave.
- You are required to keep in contact with your manager during your period of leave and when appropriate, advise your return to work date ensuring you follow the return to work arrangements (see section on 'Returning to work' below).



## **Management advice to stay at home**

We owe a duty of care to all staff to prevent the spread of infection. If, having discussed your circumstances with HR and the Senior Leadership Team, your manager may ask that, for good reason, you do not come to work for a period. If you receive that instruction, you must refrain from entering any site until your manager informs you that you may return to work. In these circumstances, if you are ill you will be recorded as absent on sick leave and paid in line with that policy. If you are not ill:

- Your manager will agree with you what work, if any, can be delivered remotely and ensure you have the necessary support to do so. You may be asked to undertake alternative duties which are suitable for remote working.
- If your manager confirms that you can work remotely but you choose not to, you may be expected to take annual leave or unpaid leave.

## **Unauthorised absence**

Good practice approach in relation to individual circumstances during this period is to be supportive, but requires cooperation from everyone.

## **Employees with underlying health conditions**

We recognise that certain groups are more vulnerable in relation to the coronavirus e.g. pregnancy, impaired immunity, certain disabilities. If you have an underlying health condition and have concerns regarding your health, you should contact your GP or Specialist and follow their advice. You may also discuss your circumstances with your Manager. This information will be handled sensitively and in confidence.

Should you have concerns about your role due to the coronavirus, you should discuss these with your manager as it may be possible to consider short term reasonable adjustments. Managers will look to put in place appropriate arrangements to enable you to continue at work but in a way that takes account of your condition. If this is not possible, you may be required to either work from home or take sick leave/other leave depending on the circumstances on a case by case basis.

## **Returning to work**

Before returning to work after a period of absence, you will be required by your team leader or manager to confirm that you have complied with the PHE and NHS guidelines and are fit and well to return.

## **Other**

Services may need to amend its approach to leave, pay and working arrangements in relation to coronavirus at short notice and we will update this guidance accordingly.

In addition please see below links to specific further information and advice and useful resources to help think and plan ahead.

[Overall Gov.UK guidance regarding COVID19/Coronavirus](#)

[Stay at Home Guidance \(in case of current symptoms and/or risk factors\)](#)

[Social distancing for older or vulnerable people](#)

[Guidance for health professionals – includes links for other non-health services](#)

[MHCLG – Guidance on services for people experiencing rough sleeping etc](#)

[ORGANISATIONAL RESILIENCE, GUIDANCE ON PANDEMIC PLANNING \(Zurich Insurance\)](#)

[Business Continuity Management Toolkit – HM Government](#)

[NCVO Guidance - Coronavirus and your organisation](#)

[NHS Catch it, Kill it, Bin it – printable poster](#)

