

COVID-19 – Update on 16 March 2020

The Government has announced a series of new measures and pieces of advice in light of the expected peak in diagnoses of coronavirus, with a view to protecting those who are most vulnerable in the United Kingdom, and in an attempt to manage pressure on the NHS.

Boris Johnson stated the government has "*tremendous powers*" in response to a question about whether individuals could be subject to criminal sanctions if they failed to comply with the measures, but the UK is a "*mature and grown up democracy*" and people "*understand the advice that is being given to them*".

UK chief medical adviser Prof Chris Whitty stated that the measures will be in place for a "*minimum of weeks to months; depending how it goes, it may be longer*".

1. Self-isolation extended – “whole household isolation”

If either an employee or anyone in their household has either a high temperature or a new and continuous cough, they are required to self-isolate for 14 days, limiting social contact as far as possible and avoiding going out other than for exercise at a safe distance to others.

The Government’s advice is:

- ❏ *if you live alone and you have symptoms of coronavirus illness (COVID-19), however mild, stay at home for **7 days** from when your symptoms started;*
- ❏ *if you live with others and you or one of them have symptoms of coronavirus, then all household members must stay at home and not leave the house for **14 days**. The 14-day period starts from the day when the first person in the house became ill;*
- ❏ *it is likely that people living within a household will infect each other or be infected already. Staying at home for 14 days will greatly reduce the overall amount of infection the household could pass on to others in the community;*
- ❏ *for anyone in the household who starts displaying symptoms, they need to stay at home for 7 days from when the symptoms appeared, regardless of what day they are on in the original 14 day isolation period.*

2. Limiting contact

The Government has advised all individuals to:

- ❏ Avoid all non-essential travel;
- ❏ Avoid all non-essential contact with others;
- ❏ Work from home wherever possible.

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We suggest that, if it is not possible to work from home, this implies that employees can continue to attend for work, but employers should be mindful of reducing/minimising travel and contact wherever practicable.

Boris Johnson specifically referenced pubs, clubs, theatres and restaurants in his address when discussing social contact, and also stated that the emergency services will no longer be supporting mass gatherings such as sporting events.

3. Individuals at higher risk

The Government was keen to stress that its guidance is particularly important to the following groups at higher risk:

- 📄 Pregnant women;
- 📄 Individuals with chronic health conditions such as chronic heart disease/kidney disease and significant conditions affecting the immune system;
- 📄 Individuals over the age of 70.

It is highly likely that, by 20 March 2020, the advice to these groups will be extended to require them to self-isolate for a period of up to 12 weeks.

4. Schools

UK chief scientific adviser Sir Patrick Vallance said it "may be necessary" to think about school closures but only "at the right stage" of the outbreak.

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Group/ Action	Wash hands more often	Household isolation for 14 days*	Self - isolation for 7 days**	Social mixing in the community***	Having friends and family to the house	Use remote access to NHS and essential services	Vary daily commute and use less public transport	Home working
0 – 69	Yes	Yes	Yes	Advised against	Advised against	Advised	Advised	Advised
70+	Yes	Yes	Yes	Strongly advised against	Strongly advised against	Strongly advised	Strongly advised	Strongly advised
Any age Member of vulnerable group with an underlying health condition ¹	Yes	Yes	Yes	Strongly advised against	Strongly advised against	Strongly advised	Strongly advised	Strongly advised
Pregnant women	Yes	Yes	Yes	Strongly advised against	Strongly advised against	Strongly advised	Strongly advised	Strongly advised
Those with serious underlying health conditions	As above, but further bespoke guidance will be provided by your GP next week							

* if one member of your family or household has a new continuous cough or high temperature

** if you live alone and you have a new continuous cough or high temperature

*** if you live alone and you have a new continuous cough or high temperature

**** for example via telephone or internet

¹ ie anyone instructed to get a flu jab each year