

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Recent developments

Prime Minister's address

Last night, PM Boris Johnson announced a major ramping up of coronavirus measures.

From last night, people in Britain are allowed to leave their homes for only "very limited purposes", such as shopping for basic necessities; for one form of exercise a day; for any medical need; and to travel to and from work when "absolutely necessary".

Key points from the PM's address:

- people have been warned not to meet friends or family members who they do not live with
- shopping is only permitted for essentials like food and medicine, and people are advised to do it "as little as you can"
- police have powers to enforce the rules, including through fines and dispersing gatherings
- all shops selling non-essential goods, such as clothing and electronic stores, are ordered to close
- libraries, playgrounds, outdoor gyms and places of worship are to close
- all gatherings of more than two people in public - excluding people you live with - are banned
- all social events, including weddings and baptisms are banned
- funerals are not included in the new restrictions
- parks will remain open for exercise but gatherings will be dispersed
- the restrictions are "under constant review" and will be checked again in three weeks. They will be relaxed "if the evidence shows we are able to", said the prime minister.

Further businesses and premises to close

Guidance has been issued detailing the closure of all non-essential businesses and premises as part of further social distancing measures. All non-essential premises must now close. Takeaway and delivery services may remain open and operational in line with guidance on Friday 20 March. Online retail is still open and encouraged and postal and delivery service will run as normal. Retail and public premises which are expected to remain open must follow certain measures, detailed in the guidance. It is available **here**

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/874732/230320 - Revised guidance note - finalVF.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/874732/230320_-_Revised_guidance_note_-_finalVF.pdf)

Other developments:

- the head of the World Health Organization has said the coronavirus pandemic is "accelerating"
- British travellers have been urged to return home immediately (see below)
- there are reports of many non-critical workers in the UK are still turning up to do their jobs because their employers are asking them to
- some businesses are unsure if the new measures apply to them - such as the construction industry. People should work from home "wherever possible" but there will be exceptions. For example, plumbers may be called out to emergencies

- Chancellor Rishi Sunak will outline more help for self-employed workers later today
- deliveries of “non-essential” goods such as toys and clothes can continue under the new measures
- in terms of visiting elderly relatives, maintaining contact through social media is the ideal but it is permissible to drop off items or groceries etc if they are unable to visit a shop themselves.

The UK's full guidance on the new measures can be found **here**

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/874742/Full_guidance_on_staying_at_home_and_away_from_others_1_.pdf

Wages

Chancellor Rishi Sunak has said the government will pay 80% of wages for employees who are not working, up to £2,500 a month.

He appealed to employers to stand by their workers during the coronavirus crisis, in the wake of many firms warning of collapse.

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Online isolation notes launched

People unable to work for more than seven days because of coronavirus (COVID-19) can obtain an isolation note through a new online service.

Isolation notes will provide employees with evidence for their employers that they have been advised to self-isolate due to coronavirus, either because they have symptoms or they live with someone who has symptoms, and so cannot work.

As isolation notes can be obtained without contacting a doctor, this will reduce the pressure on GP surgeries and prevent people needing to leave their homes.

For the first seven days off work, employees can self-certify so they don't need any evidence for their employer. After that, employers may ask for evidence of sickness absence. Where this is related to having symptoms of coronavirus or living with someone who has symptoms, the isolation note can be used to provide evidence of the advice to self-isolate.

People who need to claim Universal Credit or Employment and Support Allowance because of coronavirus will not be required to produce a fit note or an isolation note.

The notes can be accessed through the **NHS website**

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19> and **NHS 111 online**

<https://www.111.nhs.uk/covid-19>

For more information, click **here** <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/online-isolation-notes-launched-providing-proof-of-coronavirus-absence-from->

[work?utm_source=321cfce4-deee-41b4-b2b5-8cf98674b44f&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate](https://www.gov.uk/work?utm_source=321cfce4-deee-41b4-b2b5-8cf98674b44f&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate)

Latest figures

The number of COVID-19 cases has surpassed 300,000 globally.

According to the WHO's latest Situation Report [23 March 2020], there are:

Globally

332,930 confirmed

14,510 deaths

European Region

171,424 confirmed

8,743 deaths

Figures from Worldometer <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/#countries> show:

UK

6,650 confirmed cases

335 deaths

Ireland

1,125 confirmed cases

6 deaths

Coronavirus Bill 2019

The Coronavirus Bill was introduced in the House of Commons on 19 March 2020 (Bill 122).

The purpose of the Coronavirus Bill is to enable the Government to respond to an emergency situation and manage the effects of a covid-19 pandemic. A severe pandemic could infect up to 80% of the population leading to a reduced workforce, increased pressure on health services and death management processes. The Bill contains temporary measures designed to either amend existing legislative provisions or introduce new statutory powers which are designed to mitigate these impacts.

See below for more details.

Vulnerable groups

Chief medical adviser Prof Chris Whitty advises that the group of people who should take "particular care to minimise their social contact" are:

- people over the age of 70

- other adults who would normally be advised to have the flu vaccine (such as those with chronic diseases)
- pregnant women.

Stay at home: guidance for households with possible coronavirus (COVID-19) infection

Public Health England stay at home guidance is intended for:

- people with symptoms that may be caused by coronavirus, and do not require hospital treatment, who must remain at home until they are well
- those living in households with someone who shows symptoms that may be caused by coronavirus.

Travel advice

COVID-19 Exceptional Travel Advisory Notice

As countries respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, including travel and border restrictions, the FCO advises British nationals against all but essential international travel. Any country or area may restrict travel without notice. If you live in the UK and are currently travelling abroad, you are strongly advised to return now, where and while there are still commercial routes available. Many airlines are suspending flights and many airports are closing, preventing flights from leaving.

What is it?

Coronavirus (COVID-19) is a new respiratory illness that has not previously been seen in humans. The World Health Organization has named the disease the virus causes Covid-19.

Where do Coronaviruses come from?

Coronaviruses are viruses that circulate among animals but some of them are also known to affect humans. After they have infected humans, they can eventually be transmitted to humans.

What is the mode of transmission? How (easily) does it spread?

Because it's a new illness, it is not known exactly how coronavirus spreads from person to person, but similar viruses spread by respiratory droplets that people sneeze, cough, or exhale. While animals are the source of the virus, this virus is now spreading from one person to another (human-to-human transmission). At time of writing, there is currently not enough epidemiological information to determine how easily and sustainably this virus is spreading between people.

What are the symptoms?

The main signs of infection are fever (high temperature) and a cough as well as shortness of breath and breathing difficulties.

How to protect yourself

The NHS advise the following measures to help stop germs like coronavirus spreading:

- always carry tissues with you and use them to catch your cough or sneeze. Then bin the tissue, and wash your hands, or use a sanitiser gel

- wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after using public transport. Use a sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available
- avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands
- avoid close contact with people who are unwell
- if you have arrived back from China or specified areas, follow NHS advice for returning travellers.

Supporting Workers

Coronavirus: What are your rights if working from home?

This article has been published by BBC News, and addresses questions around worker's rights if working from home during the pandemic. Under the stringent new measures recently announced by the UK government [16 March] to combat the spread of coronavirus, everyone should work from home if they can.

For many people, homeworking will not be possible, but they still face the possibility of 14 days of self-isolation, under the guidelines announced by Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

In the recent Budget, some changes were made to the sick pay system which they may need to fall back on. The Statutory Sick Pay (General) (Coronavirus Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2020 have since come into force.

There has been concern that people will be more likely to infect others if they do not have incentives to stay at home when they are at risk.

Who needs to work from home?

Everyone who can work from home should do so. That creates practical issues for employers and employees, but workers should be given clear guidance as to what that means for them.

In normal circumstances, anyone working from home should receive an assessment of their domestic workplace. Clearly, this will not be possible at present, but some rights can be made clear. For example, working hours can still be clearly defined, and staff should receive their normal pay.

Who provides the equipment?

An employer is responsible for equipment they supply and must say what it should be used for.

The question of who covers the running costs should ideally be outlined as soon as possible, says the article, and would normally be part of any working from home agreement.

Given the current situation, extra costs, such as phone bills, may need to be claimed. Employers will need evidence, but can explain how the expenses system works, and whether these costs are taxable.

Who is responsible for workers while they work?

An employer has a duty of care for staff, even if they are working at home.

The requirements of health and safety legislation apply to homeworkers too, according to the employment conciliation service Acas.

What if I cannot work from home?

Owing to the financial pressures, some businesses have asked staff to take unpaid leave.

Employers have the right to tell workers to take holiday if they decide to shut for a period of time.

It is impossible for many people to work from home. However, under the new guidelines, if one person in any household has a persistent cough or fever, everyone living there must stay at home for 14 days.

Will I get paid if I self-isolate in this way?

Provisions for sick leave vary from company to company.

Many employees will have contracts that allow them their normal pay while they are unable to work because they are sick.

But the situation with self-isolation is more complicated - workers may not actually be sick so will not automatically be entitled to their contractual sick pay. That decision will be down to employers but employment conciliation service Acas said it was "good practice" to offer contractual sick pay.

Even where people do not get their fully paid sick leave, or if they work in jobs where they do not have contractual sick leave, there may be minimum payments they can rely on, known as statutory sick pay.

What is statutory sick pay?

Statutory sick pay (SSP) is money paid by employers, so self-employed workers are not eligible, but casual or agency workers are.

Chancellor Rishi Sunak said that SSP would be paid to people who had been told to isolate themselves, even if they did not have any symptoms. He said people would soon be able to obtain a sick note from the NHS 111 service rather than getting one from a GP.

The rules were also changed so that those people would be eligible for SSP on their first day away from work, instead of having to wait until the fourth day as used to be the case.

He also announced that businesses with fewer than 250 employees would be able to claim back from the government two weeks of SSP paid to staff affected by coronavirus.

How much is statutory sick pay?

It is set at £94.25 a week, although of course employers could pay more if they want to.

To put that into context, average weekly earnings in the UK in December last year stood at £544 a week.

To get SSP people need to be earning at least £118 a week. Many people such as those on zero-hours contracts - who work variable hours every week - may earn less than this. The Trades Union Congress (TUC) has calculated that there are two million workers who are not eligible for SSP and Labour has asked the government whether they will now be covered.

Will self-employed people get sick pay?

Broadly speaking, employees are entitled to sick pay and self-employed people are not.

In the latest UK figures for the last three months of 2019, there were about 28 million employed people and about five million self-employed.

The government has said it will make it “quicker and easier” for self-employed people affected by coronavirus to access benefits.

The chancellor said that those on contributory employment and support Allowance (ESA) will be able to claim from day one, instead of day eight.

He is also temporarily removing the minimum income floor from universal credit. The minimum income floor would have taken into account how much you would normally expect to earn in a month when calculating your entitlement to universal credit.

Not having the floor means they will be able to claim for time they spend off work due to sickness.

He said they would not need to attend a job centre and could apply on the phone or online instead.

The government has also announced a new £500m fund to support economically vulnerable people, which will be allocated by local authorities.

Will I get paid if I need to care for somebody else?

If you have a relative who is ill, or your children's school is closed, for example, your employer must give you time off to do so.

But your employer is not forced to pay you unless your contract requires it.

BBC News
March 2020

Further information

The CIPD has issued a **workplace questionnaire** to help organisations prepare for homeworking: <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/flexible-working/homeworking-questionnaire>

IOSH guidance can be found at <https://www.iosh.com/coronavirus>

IOSH stress that employers have a role to play in preventing the spread of the disease by taking sensible action to prevent the spread of COVID-19 such as ensuring that workers have access to appropriate hygiene facilities such hot water, soap and bins to get rid of used tissues. Workers are advised to maintain good hygiene standards around the workplace by following the latest advice from the World Health Organisation's (WHO) website which includes the following basic protective measures:

- wash your hands frequently with alcohol-based hand wash or wash with soap and water
- maintain social distancing- maintain at least 1 meter (3 feet distance) between yourself and anyone who is coughing or sneezing
- avoid touching eyes, mouth and nose
- practice respiratory hygiene
- stay informed and follow the advice given by health care providers.

Government guidance for employees, employers and businesses

This guidance is for employees, employers and businesses providing advice about the novel coronavirus, COVID-19. It has been issued by Public Health England and Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

Guidance for employers and businesses on coronavirus (COVID-19)

This guidance will assist employers, businesses and their staff in addressing coronavirus (COVID-19).

Key messages:

- businesses and workplaces should encourage their employees to work at home, wherever possible
- if someone becomes unwell in the workplace with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature, they should be sent home and advised to follow the advice to stay at home
- employees should be reminded to wash their hands for 20 seconds more frequently and catch coughs and sneezes in tissues
- frequently clean and disinfect objects and surfaces that are touched regularly, using your standard cleaning products
- employees will need your support to adhere to the recommendation to stay at home to reduce the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) to others
- those who follow advice to stay at home will be eligible for statutory sick pay (SSP) from the first day of their absence from work
- employers should use their discretion concerning the need for medical evidence for certification for employees who are unwell. This will allow GPs to focus on their patients
- employees from defined vulnerable groups should be strongly advised and supported to stay at home and work from there if possible.

The guidance sets out that it is good practice for employers to:

- keep everyone updated on actions being taken to reduce risks of exposure in the workplace
- ensure employees who are in a vulnerable group are strongly advised to follow social distancing guidance
- make sure everyone's contact numbers and emergency contact details are up to date

- make sure managers know how to spot symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) and are clear on any relevant processes, for example sickness reporting and sick pay, and procedures in case someone in the workplace is potentially infected and needs to take the appropriate action
- make sure there are places to wash hands for 20 seconds with soap and water, and encourage everyone to do so regularly
- provide hand sanitiser and tissues for staff, and encourage them to use them.

The content of the guidance covers the following:

- Symptoms
- What to do if someone develops symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) on site
- Travel arrangements
- Sick pay
- Certifying absence from work
- What to do if an employee needs time off work to look after someone
- Limiting spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) in business and workplaces
- Cleaning and waste
- Handling post or packages.

COVID-19: support for businesses

The Chancellor has set out a package of temporary, timely and targeted measures to support public services, people and businesses through this period of disruption caused by COVID-19.

This includes a package of measures to support businesses including:

- a statutory sick pay relief package for SMEs
- a 12-month business rates holiday for all retail, hospitality and leisure businesses in England
- small business grant funding of £10,000 for all business in receipt of small business rate relief or rural rate relief
- grant funding of £25,000 for retail, hospitality and leisure businesses with property with a rateable value between £15,000 and £51,000
- the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme to support long-term viable businesses who may need to respond to cash-flow pressures by seeking additional finance
- the HMRC Time To Pay Scheme.

It sets out detailed guidance on the following:

- Support for businesses who are paying sick pay to employees
- Support for businesses who pay business rates
- Support for businesses who pay little or no business rates
- Support for businesses through the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme
- Support for businesses paying tax
- Insurance.

CIPD Advice

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) suggest the following advice for organisations:

- follow public health agency advice on efficient ways to contain the virus
- keep up to date with government advice and adapt business plans to reflect changes
- actively communicate these plans to staff, customers and suppliers
- look at options for people to work remotely to prevent the spread of infection
- for customer facing organisations consider using customer self-serve options such as telephone and online services to minimise face to face interaction
- review policies and procedures on health reporting, office and personal hygiene protective equipment, social distancing and working hours
- consider providing additional training to those working in critical areas, so others have the skills to fill in for absent colleagues.

It is also noted that organisations should bear in mind that people will be worried about the situation; employers not only have a duty of care to take reasonable steps to ensure health and safety, but also the well-being of employees. Offering enhanced support to people more vulnerable to illness due to age and/or any underlying health conditions is suggested.

It should also be acknowledged, says the CIPD, that some employees may be worried about family or friends stranded in, or returning from, an affected area. It's important to strike the balance between your organisation and its people being prepared for the spread of the virus whilst reassuring people that there is no need to panic. Employers are advised to ensure that line managers are regularly informed about the organisation's contingency plans and how to discuss the situation with any concerned employees, and where to signpost people to for further advice or support, including employee assistance programmes and/or counselling if they are anxious.

The CIPD's advice pages can be found **here** <https://www.cipd.co.uk/news-views/coronavirus>

The CIPD has issued a **workplace questionnaire** to help organisations prepare for homeworking: <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/flexible-working/homeworking-questionnaire>

Support materials are also available **here** <https://www.cipd.co.uk/news-views/coronavirus/support-materials>

Acas Advice for Employers

Workplace experts Acas have also issued advice for employers on dealing with the coronavirus outbreak. It includes guidance on how to handle employees who have the virus and those who do not want to come into work because they are worried about catching it.

In this new guidance, employers and employees are advised to be flexible and sensitive to each other's situation when working from home because of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Government Travel Advice

COVID-19 Exceptional Travel Advisory Notice

As countries respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, including travel and border restrictions, the FCO has advised British nationals against all but essential international travel. Any country or area may restrict travel without notice. If you live in the UK and are currently travelling abroad, you are strongly advised to return now, where and while there are still commercial routes available. Many airlines are suspending flights and many airports are closing, preventing flights from leaving.

Find more information here <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>

You can sign up for email alerts here: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>

Self-isolating: What this means in practice

This means staying at home for 14 days and not going to work, school or public areas.

Avoid having visitors to your home; however, it is OK for friends, family or delivery drivers to drop off food.

Find NHS information on self-isolating here <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/self-isolation-advice/>

Again, this guidance is constantly under review.

Find out what to do using the NHS 111 online coronavirus service.

- 111 coronavirus service <https://111.nhs.uk/covid-19>

The NHS advice is do not go to a GP surgery, pharmacy or hospital.

Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland:

- Scotland: call your GP surgery or call 111 if your surgery is not open
- Wales: call 111
- Northern Ireland: call 111

Legislation

Coronavirus Bill 2019-21

The Coronavirus Bill was introduced in the House of Commons on 19 March 2020 (Bill 122).

The purpose of the Coronavirus Bill is to enable the Government to respond to an emergency situation and manage the effects of a covid-19 pandemic. A severe pandemic could infect up to 80% of the population leading to a reduced workforce, increased pressure on health services and death management processes. The Bill contains temporary measures designed to either amend existing

legislative provisions or introduce new statutory powers which are designed to mitigate these impacts.

The Bill aims to support Government in the following:

- increasing the available health and social care workforce
- easing the burden on frontline staff
- containing and slowing the virus
- managing the deceased with respect and dignity
- supporting people.

The Bill is required as part of a concerted effort across the whole of the UK to tackle the covid-19 outbreak. The intention is that it will enable the right people from public bodies across the UK to take appropriate actions at the right times to manage the effects of the outbreak.

As part of its contingency planning, the Government has considered what measures would be needed during a severe covid-19 outbreak to reduce the pressure of key services and limit the spread of infection.

It is stressed that these are extraordinary measures that do not apply in normal circumstances. For this reason, the legislation will be time-limited for two years and it is neither necessary nor appropriate for all of these measures come into force immediately. Instead, many of the measures in this Bill can be commenced from area to area and time to time, so as to ensure that the need to protect the public's health can be aligned with the need to safeguard individuals' rights. These measures can subsequently be suspended and then later reactivated, if circumstances permit, over the lifetime of the Act.

MPs will next consider the Bill at Second Reading. The date for second reading has not yet been announced.

Coronavirus bill: summary of impacts

The Department of Health and Social Care has issued an impact assessment document. It provides a summary of impacts relating to clauses within the Coronavirus Bill 2020 and provides an overview of the impacts considered for each clause.

The Health Protection (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020

These Regulations have been put in place to reduce the risk of further human-to-human transmission in this country by keeping individuals in isolation where public health professionals believe there is a reasonable risk an individual may have the virus.

Statutory Sick Pay (General) (Coronavirus Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2020; for the explanatory memorandum

These Regulations came into force on 17 March 2020. These are emergency regulations in relation to the Government's response to coronavirus. The regulations have been prepared as soon as it became clear that there was a need for the measures they contain.

The measures are required as a matter of urgency as part of the Government response to a developing outbreak, in order to reduce the risk that employees will continue to work despite advice that they should self-isolate.

Further information

- Check the Barbour Service for latest documents
- Plans to contain Coronavirus are set out by the UK Government
- Foreign and Commonwealth Office Travel advice: coronavirus (COVID-19)
- Department of Health and Social Care and Public Health England: Coronavirus (COVID-19): latest information and advice <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public#risk-level>
- WHO EURO has released a guide on how to stay physically active during self-quarantine; http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/coronavirus-covid-19/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-technical-guidance/stay-physically-active-during-self-quarantine/_recache#article
- Coronavirus (COVID-19): Common questions <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/common-questions/>
- Protect Home Workers – HSE homeworking advice https://www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/workers/home.htm?utm_source=linkedin&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=coronavirus&utm_term=employers-2&utm_content=dse
- CIPD Advice <https://www.cipd.co.uk/news-views/coronavirus>
- Updated CIPD FAQs <https://www.cipd.co.uk/news-views/coronavirus/faqs>
- IOSH Coronavirus pages <https://www.iosh.com/resources-and-research/our-resources/communicable-diseases/coronavirus/>
- WHO has published updated recommendations (29 February) for international traffic in relation to COVID-19 outbreak: https://www.who.int/ith/2019-nCoV_advice_for_international_traffic-rev/en/
- WHO **Situation Reports** for the latest details on the outbreak <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports/>
- WHO: Getting your workplace ready for COVID-19
- GOV.UK Novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) guidance for health professionals <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/wuhan-novel-coronavirus>
- IOSH Report Managing the safety, health and security of mobile workers <https://www.iosh.com/media/1515/iosh-managing-health-and-safety-of-mobile-workers-full-report-2016.pdf>
- Latest global figures: Coronavirus COVID-19 [Global Cases](#) by Johns Hopkins CSSEWHO ‘**coronavirus myth busters**’ <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/myth-busters>