

 Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

MHCLG Coronavirus Bulletin

01 April 2020

This is the regular bulletin MHCLG are sending out updating you on latest Government guidance, advice, communications products and other useful information about coronavirus (COVID-19).

Subscribe or unsubscribe to this email by emailing us at LSEngagement@communities.gov.uk

The following GOV.UK page has also been set up to bring together guidance for local councils and LRFs during the coronavirus outbreak: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-local-government>

**STAY AT HOME, PROTECT THE NHS,
SAVE LIVES**

Personal protection equipment

The government is working around the clock to secure supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE) for local areas. LRFs and military planners are stocktaking in regional areas to target where supplies are needed most.

All first PPE drops are currently in the process of being delivered and all CQC-registered homes will have received their first drop of PPE. In total, 170 million pieces of equipment have been delivered so far. A new distribution centre and new supply lines will be up and running in the coming fortnight which should reduce disruption.

DHSC are purchasing through existing supply chains as well as sourcing new suppliers and are engaging with other government departments to increase the response further.

Business Secretary Alok Sharma has announced new measures to ease requirements and barriers to imports for PPE and hand sanitiser. The temporary measures include allowing PPE equipment which lack the CE mark onto the market, provided products meet essential safety requirements. This will help new suppliers and businesses that produce ingredients for safe hand sanitiser and PPE to bring their products to market in a matter of days, without compromising on their safety.

If normal supply of PPE is disrupted and councils or care providers find their business as usual channels are insufficient, they should contact the National Supply Disruption Response (NSDR) which operates a 24/7 helpline.

If this does not prove satisfactory, councils should elevate the issue to their Local Resilience Forum who take a leadership role in their area in managing the supply and demand in an emergency, including by working with military planners. Local Resilience Forums have been asked to provide information on local PPE supply and need, in order to help this, and we would urge you to work with your LRFs to help this process.

The Helpline

Freephone number in the UK: 0800 915 9964

Direct Line: 0191 283 6543

Before calling the NSDR hotline, providers should ensure they are able to provide the following details to the call handler:

- Name, email and telephone number of requestor
- Name, email and telephone number for out of hours cover (or next shift)
- Delivery address, including postcode; and named contact to receive delivery
- Number of COVID-19 patients being treated (confirmed and suspected)
- Number of beds in organisation (if appropriate)
- How long your current PPE stock provides cover for (e.g. <24 hours; 1-2 days etc)

If local providers have previously raised an order with NSDR helpline but have not yet received a delivery and require stock urgently, please contact the NSDR again to indicate what stock you require. If you were previously given a case number, please provide this to your call handler.

Coronavirus Act 2020: Care Act easements

The Coronavirus Act 2020 introduced significant changes to local authority duties under the Care Act 2014. The powers in the Act, which came into force yesterday (31 March), enable local authorities, working with providers, to streamline assessments, reviews and care planning, and to prioritise care and support so that the most urgent and acute needs are met during the coming, critical period.

Yesterday (31 March), the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) published guidance to help local authorities use the easements when necessary. The guidance should be read

alongside the Government's Ethical Framework, published on 19 March.

The guidance is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-changes-to-the-care-act-2014>

The ethical framework for adult social care is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-ethical-framework-for-adult-social-care/responding-to-covid-19-the-ethical-framework-for-adult-social-care>

School meals voucher scheme

The Department for Education (DfE) yesterday (31 March) launched a national voucher scheme for children eligible for free school meals, allowing them to continue to access meals whilst they stay at home.

Schools can now provide every eligible child with a weekly shopping voucher worth £15 to spend at supermarkets while schools are closed due to coronavirus. The vouchers can be spent on food at a range of shops including Sainsbury's, Tesco, Asda, Morrisons, Waitrose and M&S, with DfE working to get more shops to join the scheme as soon as possible.

Schools will be emailed today by the Department for Education's chosen supplier, Edenred. Schools will then either be able to:

- Order vouchers individually online and have a code sent via email to each family. The family can then show the code on their phone at the supermarket; or
- Arrange a bulk order of multiple codes and receive an excel spreadsheet to help schools organise sending on to a family,

or create an eGift card for a preferred supermarket to be posted to a family if parents cannot get online.

The total value of vouchers available per eligible child per week exceeds the rate paid to schools for free school meals, recognising that families will not be buying food in bulk and may therefore incur higher costs.

Schools can continue to provide meals for collection or delivery themselves, but where this is not possible, the scheme will allow schools to provide vouchers to families electronically, or as a gift card for those without internet access.

The announcement:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/voucher-scheme-launches-for-schools-providing-free-school-meals>

The guidance:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance-for-schools>

Update on crematoria emissions monitoring

In light of the unprecedented coronavirus situation, the government is providing the following advice regarding periodic monitoring of emissions from crematoria in England:

- We advise a 3-month moratorium on periodic monitoring of crematoria (although we intend to review this in 2 months).
- Local authorities can raise queries or concerns about this to Defra via the Control.Pollution@defra.gov.uk inbox, and specific issues can be assessed on a case by case basis.

We are aware that regulators require urgent guidance, as the 2019/20 annual emissions monitoring should be completed by end of March 2020. The minimum specified frequency of emissions testing forms part of crematoria permits and these results are reported to the regulator as part of compliance. We are aware that, in some cases, testing by external emissions testing providers for the year 19/20 has yet to be completed.

As part of the response to the coronavirus pandemic it is explicit government policy that people across the country should not be making journeys unless they are absolutely critical, and all unnecessarily interaction with other people should be avoided.

To protect staff working in crematoria at this critical time, and those that may be required to carry out the periodic monitoring, we are informing local authorities to observe the 3-month moratorium. These measures are being taken to respond to the significant threat that is presently posed to public health.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to email: Control.Pollution@defra.gov.uk.

Local air quality management

DEFRA has issued advice to English local authorities (excluding London) clarifying temporary arrangements for local air quality monitoring obligations in Part IV of the Environment Act 1995.

Where it would be unsafe to do so, or if circumstances require resource to be deployed elsewhere, local authorities are not expected to deploy or collect diffusion tubes in line with the 2020 Diffusion Tube Monitoring Calendar on 1 April 2020 and 29 April 2020.

Subsequent calendar dates will be kept under review by DEFRA. Any queries about this announcement should be sent to the Local Air Quality Management Helpdesk at

LAQMHelpdesk@uk.bureauveritas.com or by contacting 0800 032 7953.

Procurement policy advice

The Cabinet Office recently published Procurement Policy Note 02/20: Supplier relief due to COVID-19. This was included in a previous MHCLG Coronavirus Bulletin. This note sets out information and guidance for public bodies on payment of their suppliers to ensure service continuity during and after the current coronavirus outbreak.

The guidance note Model Interim Payment Terms provides a set of terms that contracting authorities can use to implement PPN 02/20 in providing contractual relief to suppliers who have been affected by coronavirus (COVID-19).

The guidance note Payments to Suppliers for Contingent Workers provides guidance for contracting authorities where they have contingent workers impacted by coronavirus (COVID-19).

The Procurement Policy Note, guidance notes and a document of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) are all available to read here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/procurement-policy-note-0220-supplier-relief-due-to-covid-19>

Guidance for care of the deceased

Public Health England (PHE) yesterday (31 March) published new guidance to ensure funerals are conducted safely, consistent with social distancing principles. Faith leaders have been consulted and worked with PHE to ensure that communities, the funeral industry and the NHS are protected.

To help reduce the risk of spreading the infection, funeral directors and faith leaders are advised to restrict the number of

mourners who attend funerals, so a safe distance of at least 2 metres (3 steps) can be maintained between individuals

Only members of the deceased person's household or close family members should attend funerals. Any individual displaying symptoms of coronavirus should not attend.

The full guidance:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-care-of-the-deceased>

Announcement: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-advice-for-safe-funerals-after-discussions-with-faith-leaders>

Supporting people with disabilities

Justin Tomlinson MP, Helen Whately MP and Vicky Ford MP have released a joint statement outlining how the government plans to support disabled people, their carers, and their families during the coronavirus outbreak.

The Coronavirus Bill 2020 included vital measures to make sure we maintain frontline services and support, particularly for the vulnerable and for disabled people.

The statement:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-disabled-people-through-the-coronavirus-outbreak/supporting-disabled-people-through-the-coronavirus-outbreak>

EU Settlement Scheme applications

The EU Settlement Scheme continues to perform well and more than three million have already been granted status with more than a year left to go until the deadline for applications.

While applications continue to be processed, during this challenging time they will take longer than usual. In addition, in line with the latest Public Health England advice, some of our support services and application routes have temporarily changed. Please find an outline of these changes below. This situation is being kept under constant review and we will continue to keep you updated.

- Settlement Resolution Centre (SRC): The SRC will no longer be answering telephone calls. It will, however, continue to respond to email enquiries which can be made via the online contact form (available here: <https://eu-settled-status-enquiries.service.gov.uk/start>) and provide a call back function when required. Emails from support organisations will be prioritised where possible.
- ID document scanner locations: The ID document scanner locations are following all the latest Public Health England advice to protect staff and the decision has been made to suspend them at this time.
- Postal route for submitting Identity evidence: The postal route for submitting Identity evidence is currently suspended. We are unable to accept any documents by post at this time, but all documents already sent to us will be returned as quickly as possible. Applications can still be made online using the “EU Exit ID Document check” app.
- 57 grant funded voluntary and community sector organisations: Some services have been suspended but organisations are seeking to provide support in other ways, in line with social distancing guidance, for example via telephone and online. Please check individual organisations for further details: <https://www.gov.uk/help-eu-settlement-scheme>

There are still 15 months before the deadline of 30 June 2021 for applications to the EU Settlement Scheme, and there is plenty of support available online to help those looking to apply.

Additional support is available to those EU citizens in the UK who do not have the appropriate access, skills or confidence to apply online through Assisted Digital (<https://www.gov.uk/assisted-digital-help-online-applications>), which can offer assistance over the phone. We have translated communications materials into 26 languages and alternative formats can also be requested. These are available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/eu-settlement-scheme-translated-information-materials>

The support services outlined above will be kept under regular review. The Home Office and all delivery partners involved in supporting applicants will endeavour to reinstate these support services to their original status when it is safe to do so.

Key messages for your residents

The coronavirus is the biggest threat this country has faced in decades – and this country is not alone. All over the world we are seeing the devastating impact of this invisible killer. Which is why the government is working to a scientifically-led, step-by-step action plan – taking the right measures at the right time.

In dealing with this unprecedented challenge, what everyone must recognise is that our NHS – like any health service around the world – only has a limited number of doctors, nurses, and specialist equipment. This means it can only deal with so many sick people at once.

The more people that get sick with coronavirus at any one time the harder it is for the NHS to cope – meaning more people are likely to die from the coronavirus, as well as other serious illnesses. Therefore, if we can slow the spread of coronavirus so

fewer people are sick at any one time, we can protect the NHS's ability to cope.

That's why, in addition to lifting the capacity of the NHS, the Government is asking everyone to stay at home – unless they have one of the reasons that have been set out. It's simply the best weapon we have to slow the spread of the virus. That way we can protect the NHS and save lives.

During this difficult time for the country, we recognise the extreme disruption the necessary actions are having on people's lives, their businesses, their jobs and the nation's economy. And that's why we have produced a huge and unprecedented programme of support both for workers and for business, and we'll do everything we can to ensure people can pay their bills, stay in their home and put food on their table.

We know this will not be a short battle – beating coronavirus will take months, not weeks. But the Government is keeping all the current restrictions, and any further action that might be required, under constant review and they will be relaxed if and when the evidence shows we are able to.

However, the reality is the way ahead is hard and many lives will sadly be lost. But we have in the past so many times, the people of the United Kingdom will rise to this current challenge and we will beat the coronavirus together.

At this moment of national emergency – it is vital that we all stay at home, protect our NHS and save lives.

Coronavirus outbreak: what you can and can't do

The Cabinet Office has published frequently asked questions and answers on what the public can and can't do during the coronavirus outbreak.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do>

Help and support if your business is affected by coronavirus

HM Revenue & Customs is running a series of webinars to help employers and their staff in addressing Coronavirus. These webinars will provide an overview of the support available for businesses and will include information on the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, refunding eligible Statutory Sick Pay costs, furloughed employees and more.

To sign up for the webinar and for further information:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/help-and-support-if-your-business-is-affected-by-coronavirus-covid-19>

Pet owners and livestock keepers

The existing advice for pet owners and livestock keepers on maintaining the welfare of their animals during the coronavirus pandemic has been updated.

Anyone with symptoms of coronavirus should arrange for someone else who is not self-isolating to care for their livestock. Where this is not possible, they should ensure the basic needs of the animals are met while adhering to PHE guidelines.

If they are too unwell to care for their animals and there is no one to help, they are advised to call their local authority.

The guidance for pet owners and livestock keepers:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-people-with-animals>

Temporary changes to driver CPC requirements

The Department for Transport has put in place temporary changes in professional driver qualification requirements. This means that bus and lorry drivers whose driver qualification card expires in the period from 1 March 2020 to 30 September 2020 can continue driving.

Guidance: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-temporary-changes-to-driver-cpc-requirements>

Where to find the latest information and guidance

- Latest information on coronavirus: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>
 - NHS information on coronavirus: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>
 - Q&A from Public Health England on coronavirus: <https://publichealthmatters.blog.gov.uk/2020/01/23/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-what-you-need-to-know/>
 - Public Health England's guidance about coronavirus (COVID-19) for health professionals and other organisations: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-guidance>
 - The latest travel advice can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-advice-novel-coronavirus>
 - Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
Twitter: <https://twitter.com/mhclg>
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If you feel there is a gap in information that you want us to assist you with, or any other feedback please contact us at
lgengagement@communities.gov.uk.

You can also sign up for email updates on the UK government response to coronavirus here: <https://www.gov.uk/email-signup?link=/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response>

COVID-19: information for councils