## 20 March 2020

*This guidance can be amended and sent to employees. Please remove or add paragraphs as necessary.*

Due to the recent increased focus on Coronavirus, we would like to take the opportunity to set out our position on the various issues that may arise.

We would firstly like to reassure you that the number of cases of the virus in the UK remains low, as does the risk of exposure. However, we appreciate that the situation has been developing quickly so we have included some information below that we hope will answer some questions that you may have.

## About Coronavirus

Coronaviruses (CoV) are a large family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases. The official name for this new disease, not previously seen in humans, is COVID-19. It was first identified in Wuhan City, in China.

COVID-19 spreads in a similar way to flu, where there is close contact between people. If someone with the virus coughs or exhales and is within a metre of someone else, the other person could catch it by breathing in [droplets of infected fluid](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/getting-workplace-ready-for-covid-19.pdf). People can also catch it by touching contaminated surfaces or objects. Most people infected with the virus have mild symptoms and recover, but some experience more serious illness and may need hospital care. These include people with weakened immune systems or an underlying health condition such as diabetes, heart or lung disease.

The virus may start with a fever, followed by a dry cough and then after a week, shortness of breath which for some individuals will require hospital treatment.

People are most infectious when they have symptoms, but it is possible that the virus can be spread even before symptoms become apparent.

The incubation period of COVID-19 is between two and 14 days.

## Taking measures to reduce virus spread

As a precautionary measure, please ensure that:

* You wash your hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer
* Cover your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze and throw the tissue away immediately
* Avoid touching your eye, nose and mouth
* Avoid physical contact, ie do not shake hands or other close physical contact
* Keep at least one meter away from anyone coughing and sneezing.

## What we are doing reduce virus spread

We have hand sanitisers, hand-washing facilities and tissues available throughout the workplace. We are also ensuring that cleaning is extra thorough and includes daily cleaning of items that staff may touch such as stair handrails, door handles, taps and the kettle.

## Keeping us updated on travel plans

We know that some of you will have plans to travel in the near future, including pre-booked holidays. We would ask that you consider, for your own health, whether your travel is necessary. If you do travel, please let us know of the countries you intend to visit so that we can manage your return appropriately.

If you would like to cancel any pre-booked annual leave, please speak to us to arrange this.

## Staying at home

You must stay at home in certain circumstances and you must check the Government guidelines regularly. See [www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance).

If you must stay home due to actual or suspected coronavirus, you will receive statutory sick pay and if relevant to your contract, employer sick pay, both subject to the qualifying criteria.

If you feel only mildly unwell, you should still stay at home and we may ask if you are able to work from home. We will set up remote access to our computer systems in order to facilitate this.

## Sending employees home

If we are concerned that you may have been exposed to the virus even though you are not displaying symptoms, we may take the decision to send you home and require you not to attend work. You will receive pay during this time off. We will expect you to work from home, provided that you are well enough to do so.

## Becoming unwell with Coronavirus at work

If any employee becomes unwell at work and Coronavirus is suspected, the employee should:

* get at least 2 metres (7 feet) away from other people
* go to an unoccupied room behind a closed door
* avoid touching anything
* cough or sneeze into a tissue and put it in a bin, or if no tissues, cough and sneeze into the crook of elbow
* use a separate bathroom from others, if possible.

The unwell person should use their own mobile phone to call either:

* for NHS advice: 111
* if they’re seriously ill or injured or life is at risk: 999
* They need to state their symptoms and the country they’ve returned from in the last 14 days.

The workplace does not necessarily have to close.

The local Public Health England (PHE) health protection team will get in contact with us as the employer to:

* discuss the case
* identify people who have been in contact with the affected person
* carry out a risk assessment
* advise on any actions or precautions to take.

## Arrangements for office closure

We are currently making contingency arrangements, in order to enable staff to work at home.

We may require you to use your holiday entitlement during this time.

It is hard to predict how long offices will need to be closed for but during the closure we will remain in contact each day.

**Please therefore ensure you provide an up to date mobile phone number to STATE NAME by STATE DATE.**

## School closures

During school closure you must remain at home whilst you make alternative arrangements for your child’s care, this time will be treated in accordance with our normal rules on time off for dependants.

## Travel and meetings

At the present time, we are putting in place the following travel and meeting arrangements:

* *State any travel arrangements, eg increased working from home, no overseas travel etc.*

## Employee Assistance Programme

We would like to remind you that, if you have worries or concerns about any aspect of the current situation, you have access to a 24-hour telephone counselling service on *[insert details]*.

We do not wish to cause any worry in providing this information. We are monitoring any developments to the situation and will provide updates where necessary. We very much appreciate everyone’s cooperation during this time.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any queries about the contents of this briefing.