

COVID-19: MP Q&A PACK

Thursday 26 March, 15:00

This update is for Members of Parliament who took part in the morning call with the Paymaster General. It seeks to provide helpful information in response to the questions that MPs raised.

We are actively seeking responses to some of the more specific and technical questions and hope to provide answers to these shortly.

This document is also available to all MPs via the Parliamentary intranet.

Responses to questions raised

Issue: Basic guidance

Question: How can I take care of myself if I become infected?

- Seek prompt medical attention if your illness or the illness of any household members is worsening. If it's not an emergency, contact NHS 111 online.
- If you have no internet access, you should call NHS 111. If it is an emergency and you need to call an ambulance, dial 999 and inform the call handler or operator that you or your relative have coronavirus symptoms.
- Drink water to keep yourself hydrated; you should drink enough during the day so your urine is a pale clear colour.
- You can use over-the-counter medications, such as paracetamol, to help with some of your symptoms. Use these according to the instructions on the packet or label and do not exceed the recommended dose.

Issue: Personal Protective Equipment

Question: Are sufficient supplies reaching the frontline?

- The Government has central stockpiles of a range of medical products and is working closely with industry, the NHS and others in the supply chain to ensure these are delivered to the frontline, including the social care sector.
- New figures show the scale of the operation to ensure steady supply in the coming weeks and months:
 - On 19 March, 2.6 million face masks and 10,000 sanitisers went to Trusts in London;
 - Over the course of three days, between 20 March and 23 March, more than 200 organisations, including all NHS hospitals, received further facemasks and PPE along with ambulance trusts and other NHS organisations;
 - This week (w/c 23 March) supplies of the 'FFP3' sterile face masks are being delivered to NHS Trusts, including ambulance trusts;

- Home care providers, care homes, and hospices are receiving deliveries, with every provider receiving at least 300 facemasks;
 - Every GP practice, dental practice and community pharmacy has now had a PPE delivery.
- The NHS has world-renowned critical care facilities which include access to 5000 adult and 900 paediatric critical care ventilators, with further ventilators available outside critical care facilities.

Issue: Immunity

Question: Can NHS workers/others who have had Covid-19 go back to work? Are they immune?

- As the Health Secretary has said: “I understand why NHS staff in particular and others across the public service are keen to get testing ramped up, we need to see and are undertaking. We’ve now bought 3.5 million antibody tests to see if people who have had the virus and are immune to it and can go back to work. In the Commons I was sat next to Nadine Dorries because she now has had coronavirus and is for the time being immune to it. We expect people not to catch it except in exceptional circumstances for a second time.”

Issue: Volunteers

Question: What is the latest advice on what is permitted?

- The advice is clear that everyone should stay at home, apart from in exceptional circumstances. They may leave their house to provide care or to help a vulnerable person.
- We are doing everything we can to support vulnerable people who are without a network of friends and families.

On the NHS Volunteer Responders scheme:

- The NHS is “rallying the troops” for the war on coronavirus, with volunteers being called up to help vulnerable people stay safe and well at home.
- We’ve had a fantastic response with over 500,000 people signing up so far.
- Members of the public can sign up quickly and easily at goodsamapp.org/NHS to become NHS Volunteer Responders, and can be called on to do simple but vital tasks such as:
 - delivering medicines from pharmacies;
 - driving patients to appointments;
 - bringing them home from hospital;
 - or making regular phone calls to check on people isolating at home.
- NHS Volunteer Responders is not intended to replace local groups helping their vulnerable neighbours but is an additional service provided by the NHS.

Issue: Vulnerable people

Question: What is being done to ensure they receive sufficient food / essential supplies?

- A new Local Support System will make sure those individuals that have been identified by the NHS to stay at home, and are without a support network of friends and family, will receive basic groceries and medicine.
- Members of the armed forces are already supporting Local Resilience Forums to develop and implement their plans in support of this effort.
- National food distributors are working with the government to get the product, the food and supplies to homes.

Issue: Insurance

Question: What help / guidance is available on insurance queries?

- Ministers are aware of the issues around travel and business insurance and the volume of calls you are receiving.
- Support for businesses can be found on this gov.uk page:
<https://www.businesssupport.gov.uk/coronavirus-business-support/>

Issue: Furlough

Question: Firms are using government schemes to furlough workers. How much flexibility is available?

- Ministers are aware of your questions around how flexible the scheme can be and what scope employers will have.
- Further details will be made available in due course. We are working night and day to get the scheme up and running.

Issue: Self-employed

Question: What measures have been announced so far?

- The Chancellor of the Exchequer has announced a new Self-Employed Income Support Scheme.
- As the Chancellor said, the Government will pay self-employed people who have been adversely affected by the coronavirus a taxable grant worth 80% of their average monthly profits over the last three years, up to £2,500 a month.
- This scheme will be open to people across the UK for at least three months and will be extended for longer if necessary.
- More information on the Chancellor's announcement of support for the self-employed can be found here:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/chancellor-gives-support-to-millions-of-self-employed-individuals>

Issue: Financial support for businesses

Question: What is being provided?

- On 17 March, the Chancellor announced an unprecedented package of government support for businesses and the economy.

- £20bn of direct fiscal support for businesses in England is being provided through tax relief and cash grants to help businesses manage cash flow. This includes:
 - £330bn worth of government-backed and guaranteed loans to support businesses across the UK, delivered through two schemes:
 - A major new scheme being launched by the Bank of England, supporting liquidity among large firms through loans to help them bridge Coronavirus disruption to their cash flows;
 - The Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme, which increases the amount businesses can borrow from £1.2m to £5m, and ensures businesses can access the first 6 months of that finance interest-free, through the Government covering the first 6 months of interest payments.
 - Cash grants of up to £25,000 for retail, hospitality and leisure businesses with a rateable value of between £15,000 and £51,000.
 - Extending the business rates holiday to all eligible properties in the retail, hospitality and leisure sector, irrespective of rateable value, so that all eligible businesses will pay no business rates for 12 months.
 - A coronavirus job retention scheme.
 - Detailed information is available on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

Issue: Responsibilities of employers

Question: What should you do if your employer says you should still go to work?

- Employers need to play their part and be responsible about who actually needs to be in the office. We have been clear that you can only travel to work if the work which you are doing absolutely cannot be done from home.
- As the Deputy Chief Medical Officer has said: "If people don't feel safe in [their] work environment they should raise those concerns. A majority of employers have been sensible and supportive to staff and [the] population in general."

Issue: Pensions

Question: Will contributions be backdated? How will they be handled?

- Employers will be able to apply for a grant to cover the Employer National Insurance contributions and minimum automatic enrolment pension contributions on paying the lower of 80% of regular salary or £2,500 a month. Further guidance on this will be published in due course.
- The grant will start on the day you were placed on furlough and this can be backdated to 1 March.
- Further information on how it will operate will be published in due course.

Issue: House moves

Question: What is the advice?

- Home buyers and renters should, as far as possible, delay moving to a new house while emergency measures are in place to fight coronavirus.

- If moving is unavoidable for contractual reasons, people must follow advice on social distancing to minimise the spread of the virus.
- Anyone with symptoms, self-isolating or shielding from the virus, should not consider moving house, unless there are exceptional health and safety circumstances.

Issue: HS2

Question: Will works continue?

- HS2 Ltd has been working to ensure critical business and key activities at both their sites and offices are kept going, while following NHS and Public Health England guidance.
- In the coming days HS2 Ltd will be reviewing the majority of works on their construction sites in-line with government advice on dealing with COVID-19.

Issue: MOT

Question: What is the latest position?

- Guidance is available here:
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-mots-for-cars-vans-and-motorcycles-due-from-30-march-2020>

Issue: Caravan parks

Question: What is the latest guidance?

- Essential travel does not include visits to second homes, camp sites or caravan parks whether for isolation purposes or holidays.
- However, campsites and caravan parks should remain open where they are people's main home and government legislation on banning evictions because of loss of income due to coronavirus will apply to these sites too.

Issue: Local authorities

Question: What guidance is available on how councils should meet?

- The government plans to consider bringing forward legislation to:
 - remove the requirement for annual council meetings to take place in person.
 - allow council committee meetings to be held virtually for a temporary period.

Issue: Domestic violence

Question: What is being done to combat this?

- The government is absolutely committed to protecting victims of domestic abuse which is a heinous crime, and ensuring survivors can access a safe place with support when they need it.

- Existing sources of advice and support continue to be available to victims – including for example through the National Domestic Abuse Helpline, which is staffed 24 hours a day, every day of the year, by a dedicated team of experts.
- The government is doing everything we can to support domestic abuse service providers to keep vital refuge and safe accommodation provision up and running during the COVID-19 emergency.
- Officials are in daily contact with the domestic abuse sector to understand the additional challenges they are facing and how best to respond to help support services in these unprecedented times.
- We will work closely with the sector and the DA commissioner to monitor whether demand for domestic abuse safe accommodation is rising.

Issue: School vouchers

Question: When will these be received?

- Free school meals guidance is already available to ensure no eligible child goes hungry. It is available here:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance-for-schools>
- This page will be updated as soon as vouchers are ready.

Issue: Childminders

Question: What guidance is available?

- Guidance is available here:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-early-years-and-childcare-closures/coronavirus-covid-19-early-years-and-childcare-closures#childminders>

Issue: UK nationals abroad

Question: What is the latest advice?

- You can find the latest travel advice here:
www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-advice-novel-coronavirus
- The Government is now strongly recommending that if you live in the UK and are currently travelling abroad, whether working or on holiday abroad, you should consider returning now, where there are still commercial routes available.
- However, you should keep in mind that flights may be cancelled at short notice or other travel restrictions may be put in place by foreign governments.
- Ministers are aware of the issue of people needing accommodation and people running out of funds, and on the issue of people running out of their prescription meds.