

Tuesday, 17 March 2020

Dear Tenant,

Re: Coronavirus COVID-19

You will be aware of the growing concern around the spread of Coronavirus which is recognised as a global pandemic.

We are writing to share the latest guidance on how to avoid catching or spreading the virus, and to tell you about our approach in the event that the impact of the Coronavirus worsens.

The current government advice to avoid catching or spreading the virus is set out below.

How to avoid catching or spreading coronavirus

DO

- wash your hands with soap and water often – do this for at least 20 seconds
- always wash your hands when you get home or into work
- use hand sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available
- cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when you cough or sneeze
- put used tissues in the bin immediately and wash your hands afterwards
- try to avoid close contact with people who are unwell

Don't

- do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean

Please keep up to date through the NHS or Government websites:

www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public
www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/

and/or by watching the news as the advice is developing rapidly at this time.

If you have symptoms of coronavirus –

- a high temperature – you feel hot to touch on your chest or back
- a new, continuous cough – this means you've started coughing repeatedly

it is advisable to self-isolate.

It is vital to call us to let us know if you are self-isolating. This information will be shared with staff and contractors as appropriate.

What are we doing?

We have briefed our staff and will provide them with updates as more information comes available. We have advised staff to keep up to date through the NHS or Government websites or by watching the news as the advice is developing rapidly at this time.

We are striving to maintain high standards of hygiene across the office and our Charity Shop.

We have contacted our contractors to check that they have plans in place that aim to protect tenants needing repairs and their own staff.

We have contacted the support providers who work with residents in our supported schemes to check that they have plans in place that aim to protect tenants and their own staff delivering services.

We have developed a checklist for staff to follow before visiting tenants at home. Please do not be offended if you are questioned by a member of staff prior to a planned visit. The questions are designed with everybody's safety in mind.

If a member of our team or one of our contractors appears unwell, feel free to ask them questions to ensure your safety. Please contact us if you have any concerns.

We are taking steps to prepare a plan for continuing our services in the event that the office needs to close.

What to do if you need to contact us?

We would ask you to avoid visits to the office and do not visit us if you are unwell.
For the time being please use the telephone as your main source of contacting the office.

Our website contains information on ways to pay your rent, report non-urgent repairs, incidents of anti-social behaviour or to make a complaint. We will also add links to Government advice on the virus.

For non-urgent work we may call you to re-arrange any appointments you may have.



Your neighbours

At this time, we would ask you to look out for your neighbours. If someone does have to self-isolate they may need help with shopping or maybe a phone call to check in and have a chat. If you have any concerns, let us know.

Information

We have attached the latest guidance from the government in relation to social distancing and staying at home.

Please read these carefully but be prepared for guidance to change as further announcements are made.

Further news

We aim to provide high quality services to our tenants & partners. In order to achieve this, following the Easter period, we will be closing the office to the public on Tuesday mornings to allow for staff training and meetings.

Messages will be taken during Tuesday morning office closures by our out of hours service provider and these will be picked up by staff on Tuesday afternoons.

If you would like to discuss the contents of this letter and what it will mean for you, please give us a ring.

Yours sincerely



Mandy Elliott
Chief Executive Officer





COVID-19: stay at home guidance from Public Health England

(source: www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-people-with-confirmed-or-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection)

Symptoms

The most common symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) are recent onset of:

- new continuous cough and/or
- high temperature

For most people, coronavirus (COVID-19) will be a mild infection

Main messages

- if you have symptoms of coronavirus infection (COVID-19), however mild, do not leave your home for 7 days from when your symptoms started. (See [ending isolation](#) section below for more information)
- this action will help protect others in your community while you are infectious
- plan ahead and ask others for help to ensure that you can successfully stay at home
- ask your employer, friends and family to help you get the things you need to stay at home
- stay at least 2 metres (about 3 steps) away from other people in your home if possible
- sleep alone, if possible
- wash your hands regularly for 20 seconds, each time using soap and water, or use hand sanitiser
- stay away from vulnerable individuals, such as the elderly and those with underlying health conditions, as much as possible
- you do not need to call NHS 111 to go into self-isolation. If your symptoms worsen during home isolation or are no better after 7 days, contact [NHS 111 online](#). If you have no internet access, call NHS 111. For a medical emergency dial 999

Who this guidance is for

This advice is intended for people with symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19), including those with a diagnosis of coronavirus (COVID-19) infection, who must remain at home until they are well.

Will I be tested if I think I have COVID-19?

We will not be testing those self-isolating with mild symptoms. The following advice is designed to help people prevent the spread.

Why staying at home is very important

Staying at home while you have coronavirus (COVID-19) helps to protect your friends, colleagues and the wider community. It will also help to control the spread of the virus.



We realise that staying at home may be difficult or frustrating, but there are things that you can do to help make it easier. These include:

- plan ahead and think about what you will need to be able to stay at home for the full 7 days
- talk to your employer, friends and family to ask for their help to access the things you will need
- think about and plan how you can get access to food and other supplies such as medications that you will need during this period
- ask friends or family to drop off anything you need or order supplies online. Make sure any deliveries are left outside your home for you to collect
- make sure that you keep in touch with friends and family over the phone or through social media
- think about things you can do during your time at home. People who have successfully completed a period of staying at home have kept themselves busy with activities such as cooking, reading, online learning and watching films
- when you are feeling better, remember that physical exercise can be good for your wellbeing. Look for online classes or courses to help you take light exercise in your home

**While you are staying at home, make sure you do the following things:
Stay at home**

You should remain in your home. Do not go to work, school, or public areas, and do not use public transport or taxis. You cannot go for a walk.

You will need to ask friends or relatives if you require help with buying groceries, other shopping or picking up medication. Alternatively, you can order medication by phone or online. You can also order your shopping online. Make sure you tell delivery drivers to leave items outside for collection if you order online. The delivery driver should not come into your home.

At home, try as best you can to separate yourself from the people you live with

Aim to stay in a well-ventilated room with a window that can be opened. Try to keep the window open as much as possible to enable ventilation and airflow as this will help to keep clean air moving through your room.

Try to separate yourself from other people in your home and keep the door closed. If you cannot stay in a separate room aim to keep 2 metres (3 steps) away from the other people in your house. This can be particularly difficult for those with small children, people with other caring responsibilities or those living in studio apartments or flats, for example.

Further advice can be found below. Try to keep yourself separated from other people as much as possible, and make sure everyone regularly follows the steps in this guidance (cleaning your hands, not touching your face and cleaning surfaces for example).



Use your own toothbrushes, eating and drinking utensils (including cups and glasses in the bathroom and bedroom), dishes, towels, washcloths or bed linen. Do not share food and drinks.

If you have a garden, it is fine to use it as long as you keep 2 metres away from other members of your household. If possible they should use the outside area separately, if possible.

Use of shared spaces if you live with others

Minimise the time you spend in shared spaces such as bathrooms, kitchens and sitting rooms as much as possible and keep shared spaces well ventilated.

Aim to keep 2 metres (3 steps) away from people you live with and sleep in a different bed where possible. If you can, use a separate bathroom from the rest of the household. Make sure you use separate towels from other people in your house, both for drying yourself after bathing or showering and for hand-hygiene purposes. Ask your family or the people you live with to remember to use their own towels.

If you do share toilet and bathroom, it is important that you clean them after you have used them every time (for example, wiping surfaces you have come into contact with). Another tip is to consider drawing up a rota for bathing, with you using the facilities last, before thoroughly cleaning the bath, sink and toilet yourself.

If you share a kitchen with others, avoid using it while others are present. Take your meals back to your room to eat. If you have one, use a dishwasher to clean and dry your used crockery and cutlery. If this is not possible, wash them using your usual washing up liquid and warm water and dry them thoroughly, remembering to use a separate tea towel.

We understand that it will be difficult for some people to separate themselves from others at home. You should do your very best to follow this guidance and everyone in your household should regularly wash their hands, avoid touching their face and clean frequently touched surfaces.

If you live alone with children

Keep following this advice to the best of your ability, however we are aware that not all these measures will be possible.

What we have seen so far is that children with COVID-19 appear to be less severely affected. It is nevertheless important to do your best to follow this guidance.

If a child develops symptoms, they need to stay at home for 7 days from the onset of their symptoms.

If you live with an older, vulnerable or pregnant person



If you provide care to an elderly, vulnerable or pregnant person, follow this advice to the best of your ability.

If you are breastfeeding while infected

There is currently no clinical evidence to suggest that the virus can be transmitted through breast milk. Infection can be spread to the baby in the same way as to anyone in close contact with you. The benefits of breastfeeding outweigh any potential risks of transmission of the virus through breast milk or by being in close contact with your child, however, this will be an individual decision and can be discussed with your midwife, health visitor or GP by telephone.

If you wish to breastfeed, take precautions to limit the potential spread of COVID-19 to the baby by:

- washing your hands before touching the baby, breast pump or bottles
- avoiding coughing or sneezing on the baby while feeding at the breast
- cleaning any breast pump as recommended by the manufacturer after each use
- considering asking someone who is well to feed your expressed breast milk to the baby

If you are feeding with formula or expressed milk, sterilise the equipment carefully before each use. You should not share bottles or a breast pump with someone else. You can find more information at the [Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists website](#).

Cleaning and disposal of waste

Use your usual household products, such as detergents and bleach, as these will be very effective at getting rid of the virus on surfaces. Clean frequently touched surfaces.

Personal waste (such as used tissues) and disposable cleaning cloths can be stored securely within disposable rubbish bags. These bags should be placed into a second bag, tied securely and kept separate from other waste in the room in which you are self-isolating. Keep aside for at least 72 hours before putting into your usual external household waste bin.

Other household waste can be disposed of as normal.

Laundry

Do not shake dirty laundry; this minimises the possibility of dispersing virus through the air.



Wash items as appropriate in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. Dirty laundry that has been in contact with an ill person can be washed with other people's items.

If you do not have a washing machine, wait a further 72 hours after your 7-day isolation period has ended before taking your laundry to a laundrette.

What you can do to help yourself get better

Drink water to keep yourself hydrated; you should drink enough during the day so your urine (pee) 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.

If you need to seek medical advice

Seek prompt medical attention if your illness 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 have coronavirus (COVID-19).

All routine medical and dental appointments should usually be cancelled while you are sick and staying at home. If you are concerned or have been asked to attend in person within the period you are home isolating, discuss this with your medical contact first (for example, your GP, local hospital or outpatient service), using the number they have provided. If your concerns are related to COVID-19 contact [NHS 111 online](#).

If you have no internet access, call NHS 111.

Wash your hands often

Cleaning your hands frequently throughout the day by washing with soap and water for 20 seconds or using hand sanitiser will help protect you and the people you live with. This step is one of the most effective ways of reducing the risk of infection to you and to other people.

Cover your coughs and sneezes

Cover your mouth and nose with disposable tissues when you cough or sneeze.

If you have a carer, they should use disposable tissues to wipe away any mucus or phlegm after you have sneezed or coughed. The cleaner should then clean their hands. Put tissues into a disposable rubbish bag and immediately wash your hands with soap and water or use a hand sanitiser.



Facemasks

Facemasks are not recommended as an effective means of preventing the spread of infection. They play an important role in clinical settings, such as hospitals, but there's very little evidence of benefit from their use outside of these settings. However, if you receive external care you may be asked to wear a mask to minimise the risk to your carer.

Do not have visitors in your home

Do not invite or allow social visitors, such as friends and family, to enter your home. If you want to speak to someone who is not a member of your household, use the phone or social media.

If you have pets in the household

At present, there is no evidence that companion animals or pets such as dogs and cats, can be infected with coronavirus (COVID-19).

Looking after your wellbeing while staying at home

We know that staying at home for a prolonged period of time can be difficult, frustrating and lonely for some people and that you may feel low. It's important to remember to take care of your mind as well as your body and to get support if and when you need it. Stay in touch with family and friends over the phone or on social media. There are also sources of support and information that can help.

<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/>

Think about things you can do during your time at home. People who have successfully completed a period of staying at home have kept themselves busy with activities such as cooking, reading, online learning and watching films. If you feel well enough you can take part in light exercise within your home or garden.

Ending self-isolation

You should remain at home until 7 days after the onset of your symptoms. After 7 days, if you feel better and no longer have a high temperature, you can return to your normal routine. If you have not had any signs of improvement and have not already sought medical advice, contact [NHS 111 online](#). If you have no internet access, call NHS 111.

Coughing may persist for several weeks in some people, despite the coronavirus infection having cleared. A persistent cough alone does not mean you must continue to self-isolate for more than 7 days.



COVID-19: guidance on social distancing and for vulnerable people from Public Health England

(source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults>)

Background and Scope of Guidance

This guidance is for everyone. It advises on social distancing measures we should all be taking to reduce social interaction between people in order to reduce the transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19). It is intended for use in situations where people are living in their own homes, with or without additional support from friends, family and carers. If you live in a residential care setting - guidance is available at [residential care setting](#)

We are advising those who are at increased risk of severe illness from coronavirus (COVID-19) to be particularly stringent in following social distancing measures.

This group includes those who are:

- aged 70 or older (regardless of medical conditions)
- under 70 with an underlying health condition listed below (ie anyone instructed to get a flu jab as an adult each year on medical grounds):
 - chronic (long-term) respiratory diseases, such as [asthma](#), [chronic obstructive pulmonary disease \(COPD\)](#), emphysema or [bronchitis](#)
 - chronic heart disease, such as [heart failure](#)
 - [chronic kidney disease](#)
 - chronic liver disease, such as [hepatitis](#)
 - chronic neurological conditions, such as [Parkinson's disease](#), [motor neurone disease](#), [multiple sclerosis \(MS\)](#), a learning disability or cerebral palsy
 - [diabetes](#)
 - problems with your spleen – for example, [sickle cell](#) disease or if you have had your spleen removed
 - a weakened immune system as the result of conditions such as [HIV and AIDS](#), or medicines such as [steroid tablets](#) or [chemotherapy](#)
 - being seriously overweight (a BMI of 40 or above)
 - those who are pregnant

Note: there are some clinical conditions which put people at even higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19. If you are in this category, next week the NHS in England will directly contact you with advice the more stringent measures you should take in order to keep yourself and others safe. For now, you should rigorously follow the social distancing advice in full, outlined below.



People falling into this group are those who may be at particular risk due to complex health problems such as:

- People who have received an organ transplant and remain on ongoing immunosuppression medication
- People with cancer who are undergoing active chemotherapy or radiotherapy
- People with cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukaemia who are at any stage of treatment
- People with severe chest conditions such as cystic fibrosis or severe asthma (requiring hospital admissions or courses of steroid tablets)
- People with severe diseases of body systems, such as severe kidney disease (dialysis)

What is social distancing?

Social distancing measures are steps you can take to reduce the social interaction between people. This will help reduce the transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19).

They are:

1. Avoid contact with someone who is displaying symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19). These symptoms include high temperature and/or new and continuous cough;
2. Avoid non-essential use of public transport, varying your travel times to avoid rush hour, when possible;
3. Work from home, where possible. Your employer should support you to do this. Please refer to employer guidance for more information;
4. Avoid large gatherings, and gatherings in smaller public spaces such as pubs, cinemas, restaurants, theatres, bars, clubs
5. Avoid gatherings with friends and family. Keep in touch using remote technology such as phone, internet, and social media.
6. Use telephone or online services to contact your GP or other essential services.

Everyone should be trying to follow these measures as much as is pragmatic.

For those who are over 70, have an underlying health condition or are pregnant, we strongly advise you to follow the above measures as much as you can, and to significantly limit your face-to-face interaction with friends and family if possible.

This advice is likely to be in place for some weeks.

Handwashing and Respiratory Hygiene

There are general principles you can follow to help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses, including:



- washing your hands more often - with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use a hand sanitiser when you get home or into work, when you blow your nose, sneeze or cough, eat or handle food
- avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands
- avoid close contact with people who have symptoms
- cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in a bin and wash your hands
- clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces in the home

What should you do if you develop symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19)

The same guidance applies to the general population and those at increased risk of severe illness from coronavirus (COVID-19). If you develop symptoms of COVID-19 (high temperature and/or new and continuous cough), self-isolate at home for 7 days. You can find the full guidance at [stay at home](#)

How can I get assistance with foods and medicines if I am reducing my social contacts?

Ask family, friends and neighbours to support you and use online services. If this is not possible, then the public sector, business, charities, and the general public are gearing up to help those advised to stay at home. It is important to speak to others and ask them to help you to make arrangements for the delivery of food, medicines and essential services and supplies, and look after your physical and mental health and wellbeing.

If you receive support from health and social care organisations, for example if you have care provided for you through the local authority or health care system, this will continue as normal. Your health or social care provider will be asked to take additional precautions to make sure that you are protected. The advice for formal carers is included in the [Home care provision](#).

What should you do if you have hospital and GP appointments during this period?

We advise everyone to access medical assistance remotely, wherever possible. However, if you have a scheduled hospital or other medical appointment during this period, talk to your GP or clinician to ensure you continue to receive the care you need and consider whether appointments can be postponed.

What is the advice for visitors including those who are providing care for you?

You should contact your regular social visitors such as friends and family to let them know that you are reducing social contacts and that they should not visit you during this time, unless they are providing essential care for you. Essential care includes things like help with washing, dressing, or preparing meals.



If you receive regular health or social care from an organisation, either through your local authority or paid for by yourself, inform your care providers that you are reducing social contacts and agree a plan for continuing your care.

If you receive essential care from friends or family members, speak to your carers about extra precautions they can take to keep you safe. You may find this guidance on [Home care provision](#) useful.

It is also a good idea to speak to your carers about what happens if one of them becomes unwell. If you need help with care but you're not sure who to contact, or if you do not have family or friends who can help you, you can contact your local council who should be able to help you.

What is the advice if I live with a vulnerable person?

If you live in a house with a vulnerable person refer to our [household guidance](#)

How do you look after your mental wellbeing?

Understandably, you may find that social distancing can be boring or frustrating. You may find your mood and feelings are affected and you may feel low, worried or have problems sleeping and you might miss being outside with other people.

At times like these, it can be easy to fall into unhealthy patterns of behaviour which in turn can make you feel worse. There are simple things you can do that may help, to stay mentally and physically active during this time such as:

- Look for ideas of exercises you can do at home on the [NHS website](#)
- Spend time doing things you enjoy – this might include reading, cooking, other indoor hobbies or listening to/watching favourite radio or TV programmes
- Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, drink enough water, exercise regularly, and try to avoid smoking, alcohol and drugs
- Keep your windows open to let in fresh air, get some natural sunlight if you can, or get outside into the garden. You can also go for a walk outdoors if you stay more than 2 metres from others

Further information on looking after your mental health during this time is available.

What steps can you take to stay connected with family and friends during this time?

Draw on support you might have through your friends, family and other networks during this time. Try to stay in touch with those around you over the phone, by post, or online. Let people know how you would like to stay in touch and build that into your routine. This is also important in looking after your mental wellbeing and you may find it helpful to talk to them about how you are feeling.



Remember it is OK to share your concerns with others you trust and in doing so you may end up providing support to them too. Or you can use a [NHS recommended helpline](#).

What is the advice for informal carers?

If you are caring for someone who is vulnerable, there are some simple steps that you can take to protect them and to reduce their risk at the current time. Ensure you follow advice on good hygiene such as:

- Wash your hands on arrival and often, using soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when you cough or sneeze.
- Put used tissues in the bin immediately and wash your hands afterwards.
- Do not visit if you are unwell and make alternative arrangements for their care.
- Provide information on who they should call if they feel unwell, how to use NHS111 online coronavirus service and leave the number for NHS 111 prominently displayed.
- Find out about different sources of support that could be used and access further advice on creating a contingency plan is available from [Carers UK](#)
- Look after your own well-being and physical health during this time. Further information on this is available here



Summary of advice

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

