

# Briefing Note 01 - COVID-19 Guidance

As at 09:00 19<sup>th</sup> March 2020

## 1. Key Sources of Government Advice

The original advice document is the '**Government's Coronavirus: action plan – A guide to what you can expect across the UK**' which was published on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2020. This is downloadable from:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/869827/Coronavirus\\_action\\_plan\\_-\\_a\\_guide\\_to\\_what\\_you\\_can\\_expect\\_across\\_the\\_UK.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/869827/Coronavirus_action_plan_-_a_guide_to_what_you_can_expect_across_the_UK.pdf)

The virus is a new one, originating in China and therefore the response by countries has varied significantly. This is reflected in the UK government's advice which states: '*The exact response to coronavirus (COVID-19) will be tailored to the nature, scale and location of the threat in the UK, as our understanding of this develops*'. In other words, if we are not sure exactly what we are dealing with it is very difficult to be confident what measures will work to stop its spread. We can see the changes in approach over the past couple of weeks.

Computer modelling (this means predictions based on scientific and medical assessments) by UK experts is influencing and shaping the government's response, but this is not completely accurate, or possibly not accurate at all. Some estimates of potential deaths in the UK vary wildly from 250,000 to 500,000, but the Chief Scientific Adviser to the government, Sir Patrick Vallance, recently said on 17<sup>th</sup> March that he hoped the measures introduced on Monday 16<sup>th</sup> March would keep deaths under 20,000. <https://www.itv.com/news/2020-03-17/coronavirus-71-people-have-died-in-the-uk-and-around-55-000-have-covid-19/>

## 2. World Health Organisation (WHO) Advice

The WHO website contains information about the global measures that are being taken, together with advice to countries and information how to protect yourself. The UK advice is adapted from the WHO advice. Rolling updates can be found here:

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

## 3. UK Medical Advice

It is not yet known how the virus spreads from person to person. There is no vaccine.

The global pandemic has led to 2,626 confirmed cases in the UK with 104 deaths as at Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> March.

Medical advice and how to protect yourself is given on the NHS website and are updated daily. It is available from: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/> with hand-washing being the key countermeasure to reduce the spread of the virus.

The symptoms affect the lungs and airways and have been summarised as:

- A cough
- Shortness of breath
- Fever

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The concept of social distancing was introduced on 16<sup>th</sup> March and guidance is available here: <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>

## 4. Government Response

A range of detailed guidance and the government response is being updated almost daily and is available from:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response>

The government stated on 18<sup>th</sup> March that tests to identify individuals who may have the virus will be ramped up to 25,000 a day, but no details have been given.

Public transport in London is being reduced as from 19<sup>th</sup> March to reduce the opportunity for people to travel. This is intended to slow down the spread of the disease.

Schools will be closed from Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> March and politicians have indicated they may remain closed until September 2020. Special arrangements are going to be announced for children whose parents are 'essential workers' such as police officers and healthcare staff, and those deemed vulnerable. It is not known how this will work. Expect information to come out today or tomorrow – Friday 20<sup>th</sup> March.

The military COVID Support Force is being 'made ready' with a suggested 20,000 troops, but no deployment measures are available yet.

Additional emergency legislation should be passed this week, possibly today.

The government's position is to introduce the 'right measures at the right time'.

## 5. Speculation, rumours and 'fake news'

Unfortunately, predictions about what is likely to happen in a rapidly changing environment is not being helped by some sensational media reporting, their questionable analysis of known but incomplete case data – described as 'growing fast with fatal consequences' – and 'leaks' of so-called planned actions from unnamed 'Whitehall sources'. 'Deaths soar – and army in' being one of the headlines in the Daily Mail on Thursday, 19<sup>th</sup> March 2020.

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