

Government urges gambling industry to tackle risks of problem gambling during coronavirus outbreak

- The Minister has written to the Chief Executives of five leading online gambling operators asking them to take extra steps to protect players at this time of heightened risk.
- He will also host a virtual roundtable with major problem gambling treatment and support organisations on the impacts of coronavirus.

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) has requested regular intelligence from the industry on patterns of gambling during the coronavirus outbreak, including how operators are managing the risk of problem gambling and what more companies can do to promote safer gambling messaging during the current crisis.

Culture Minister Nigel Huddleston has written to the Chief Executives of five leading online gambling operators – Bet 365, GVC, Skybet, William Hill and Flutter – and the trade body the Betting and Gaming Council – to:

- Request regular and comprehensive internal data around online gambling habits as a result of the ongoing lockdown measures;
- Remind them of their responsibilities and encourage extra steps to protect players at this time of heightened risk;
- Call for a greater prominence of safer gambling messaging within their advertising aimed at existing and potential customers across television, radio, online and print media. This should more clearly warn of risks and signpost people to sources of support, such as GambleAware.

The latter action follows the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) announcing an increase in gambling-related complaints since the start of the coronavirus epidemic. DCMS has requested further details from the ASA on the scale and trends of these complaints.

These measures will support DCMS and the Gambling Commission to make a full assessment of the impact of the current circumstances on gambling habits, monitor whether risks are materialising, to what extent operators are taking action, and whether the current regulations and voluntary measures by the industry are sufficient to prevent an increase in gambling-related harm.

Although there is no firm evidence at this stage, there are concerns that the current social distancing measures could lead to an increase in problem gambling online with people in lockdown and internet usage up.

This follows reports received by the Gambling Commission of a recent increase in consumer activity around online slots, poker, casino gaming and virtual sports, following the cancellation of most live sport and the closure of all land-based gambling premises. Players of online casino games, for instance,

have been identified by the Commission as over three times more likely to be problem gamblers than those who take part in general sports betting.

Nigel Huddleston, Minister for Sport, Tourism and Heritage, said:

As we stay at home and spend more time online, it is vital that no stone is left unturned in protecting people from gambling related harm.

Whilst overall gambling participation has fallen in recent weeks and the industry has made notable contributions to support the national response, we must take proactive steps now, and keep these measures under review.

I expect patterns of play to be closely monitored so we can move quickly if there is any evidence of problem gambling increasing. I also want more to be done to promote responsible gambling during the pandemic.

The Minister will also host a virtual roundtable with major problem gambling treatment and support organisations in the coming weeks. This will provide an opportunity to discuss the impacts of coronavirus, to assess trends in service use, how remote treatment provision is working and an assessment of current self-exclusion measures.

The government has already taken strong steps to ensure consumers are protected from gambling related harm including introducing a ban on gambling with credit cards, which came into effect across Great Britain on 14 April 2020. At the end of last month it also became mandatory for all online gambling operators to integrate with Gamstop, the online self exclusion tool, ensuring that consumers only need to sign up once to be blocked from all licensed online gambling.

The Government has also already announced that it will review the Gambling Act to ensure it is fit for the digital age. Further details about the review will be provided in due course.

ENDS

Notes to editors

On 25 March 2020 the Gambling Commission wrote to all online operators to make clear expectations on consumer protection and compliance with licence conditions.

On 7 April 2020 the Advertising Standards Authority introduced a new process for the public to report inappropriate advertising.

There are robust requirements for operators to safeguard players across every form of gambling. All operators must adhere to these rules if they wish to operate in the British market.

The Gambling Commission has a range of powers to take strong action against any company that breaks the rules, whether online or in land-based premises.