

Health Secretary announces strengthened legal powers to bolster public health protections against coronavirus

The regulations have been put in place with immediate effect to impose restrictions on any individual considered by health professionals to be at risk of spreading the virus.

The regulations apply to any individuals seeking to leave supported isolation before the current quarantine period of 14 days is complete. It will also apply to future cases during the current coronavirus incident where an individual who may be infected or contaminated could present a risk to public health.

Today's announcement is not a result of a change in risk to the UK public, which remains moderate.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said:

I will do everything in my power to keep people in this country safe. We are taking every possible step to control the outbreak of coronavirus.

NHS staff and others will now be supported with additional legal powers to keep people safe across the country. The transmission of coronavirus would constitute a serious threat – so I am taking action to protect the public and isolate those at risk of spreading the virus.

Clinical advice has not changed about the risk to the public, which remains moderate. We are taking a belt and braces approach to all necessary precautions to ensure public safety.

Our infection control procedures are world leading – what I am announcing today further strengthens our response.

The regulations have been put in place to reduce the risk of further human-to-human transmission in this country.

The strengthened powers, effective immediately, will ensure that NHS staff dealing with possible cases can be confident the necessary powers are in place to keep individuals in isolation where public health professionals believe there is a reasonable risk an individual may have the virus. This is in line with measures taken in other countries.

Over the weekend, the latest government-chartered flight brought a further 100 individuals from the centre of the outbreak in Hubei province to stay in supported isolation in the UK.

The individuals have been taken to the Kents Hill Park conference centre in Milton Keynes where they will remain for 14 days until the end of the incubation period. This follows the same approach for those currently being housed in Arrowe Park NHS accommodation in Wirral.

All passengers were asked to sign a consent form agreeing to stay in supported isolation for at least 14 days until the incubation period is over. In all cases so far, supported isolation has been effective in controlling the spread of the virus.

These powers will give the public further confidence that the repatriation of British citizens back to the UK from Hubei does not increase the risk of further cases in this country.

The UK Chief Medical Officers currently assess the risk to the UK to be moderate.