

Health and Social Care Secretary's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 15 May 2020

[Coronavirus press conference \(15 May 2020\)](#)

Good afternoon and welcome to Downing Street for the daily coronavirus briefing.

I'm joined by the Deputy Chief Medical Officer Dr Jenny Harries and by NHS England's Medical Director for Primary Care Dr Nikki Kanani.

I want to take this chance to update you on the latest coronavirus data. 2,353,078 tests for coronavirus have now been carried out in the UK, including 133,784 tests yesterday. 236,711 people have tested positive for the virus, an increase of 3,560 since yesterday. 10,024 people are currently in hospital with coronavirus. This is a 13% fall from the same time last week.

And very sadly of those who tested positive, across all settings, 33,998 people have now died. That's an increase of 384 since yesterday. And we mourn each one. The number of deaths is falling each day, in all settings thankfully, and we are past the peak of this virus.

I want to take a moment to remind everyone about our plans for this second phase. We have set up the new COVID Alert Level System. That's the five levels of threat – based on the R value and the number of new cases. The alert level in turn guides the social distancing rules, which are vital in our efforts to control the virus.

A higher alert level means stricter rules. Throughout the lockdown, we have been at Level 4 which means that Covid-19 is in general circulation and transmission is high or rising exponentially.

But, thanks to your shared sacrifice, we've brought R down. Cautiously, carefully and responsibly, we are now in a position to start moving to Level 3.

We've set out the first of the three steps that we'll take to carefully to modify the social distancing rules and start to restore freedom to this country all the while avoiding a disastrous second peak that could overwhelm the NHS.

At each step, we will closely monitor the impact on R, on the number of new infections, and on of course all available data. And we'll only move to the next step when we judge it is safe to do so.

In the first step, as of this week if you work but can't work from home, you should speak to your employer about going back in. People can now spend time

outdoors and exercise as often as you like and you can meet one other person from outside your household in an outdoor, public place. But please keep 2 metres apart.

This weekend, with the good weather and the new rules, I hope people can enjoy being outside but please stick with the rules, keep an eye on your family and don't take risks.

We've also updated what we're asking to people to do, which is to Stay Alert, Control the Virus and Save Lives.

For the vast majority of people, staying alert still means staying at home as much as is possible. Working from home when you can, limiting contact with people, keeping your distance if you go out: 2 metres wherever possible. washing your hands regularly. This is still the single most effective thing that you can do to keep yourself safe and of course, self-isolating if you or anyone in your household has coronavirus symptoms.

By staying alert and following the rules, you can play a part in the national effort getting the R down and keeping R down controlling the virus so that we can save lives, rebuild livelihoods and start to recover our freedom.

Care home support package backed by £600 million to help reduce coronavirus infections

- £600 million Infection Control Fund to reduce transmission of coronavirus in care homes
- This forms part of wider support for care home residents and staff, including by limiting staff movement, protecting wages and giving access to NHS personal protective equipment (PPE) training
- Each care home in England to be given a named clinical lead to provide direct care for residents
- A wellbeing package will be also launched on CARE Workforce app to support the workforce with Hospice UK and Samaritans

A new £600 million Infection Control Fund has been introduced to tackle the spread of COVID-19 in care homes in addition to £3.2 billion of financial support made available to local authorities to support key public services since the start of the crisis.

The fund, which is ringfenced for social care, will be given to local authorities to ensure care homes can continue to halt the spread of coronavirus by helping them cover the costs of implementing measures to reduce transmission.

Care homes will be asked to restrict permanent and agency staff to working in only one care home wherever possible. The funding could be used to meet the additional costs of restricting staff to work in one care home and pay the wages of those self-isolating.

[Care home support package](#)

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

This £600 million Infection Control Fund will help as we continue to reduce infections in care homes and save lives.

From the very start of this outbreak, we have been working to protect our brilliant social care workforce and the most vulnerable in our society.

Our package sets out clearly the extra steps local councils and care homes should be taking as we stamp out the spread of this virus.

In further measures announced today:

- all local authorities must conduct a daily review of care homes in their area to ensure care homes have the support they need with staffing, help with accessing PPE and other areas of operation
- the NHS will ensure that each care home has a named clinical contact to provide better access to clinical advice through weekly check-ins to review their patients, and offer direct support for staff with use of equipment and medication
- a wellbeing package for social care staff is also being rolled out today on the new CARE app including 2 new helplines, led by the Samaritans and Hospice UK. This will help support care staff with their mental health and wellbeing and support those who have experienced a traumatic death as part of their work or help with anxiety and stress

Minister for Care Helen Whately said:

Our care homes, and those working tirelessly to look after our loved ones are at the heart of our fight against this invisible enemy, which is why we're doing everything we can to make sure the sector has all the support it needs to stop the spread and save lives.

Our support package introduces stronger measures on infection control and steps up clinical support to make sure there is a clinical lead assigned to every care home right across the country to offer advice and quicker support. This is an important set of measures to support care homes and their staff – to continue to do wonderful work caring for people, even at this most difficult of times.

Local Government Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

We have already provided councils with over £3.2 billion during this pandemic so that they can respond to the immediate pressures they are facing, including supporting social care.

This new funding will be distributed to councils based on the number of care home beds in their area and will be passed on quickly to care providers. It will fund new measures to reduce the transmission of coronavirus in care homes, minimise infection, keep staff and residents safe and, ultimately, save lives.

Wellbeing support

Samaritans, working with NHS England, have extended the use of their helpline to all social care workers. Social care staff will be able to speak to a trained Samaritans adviser who will provide a non-judgmental listening ear, safe space to offload and signposting to other services.

Hospice UK will also extend their bereavement and trauma support hotline to people working in social care, with specialist counsellors available to support staff who have experienced trauma, stress or anxiety through their work. Mental health and wellbeing guidance for the adult social care workforce was recently published on the app to support staff and employers through the outbreak.

Testing

All symptomatic and asymptomatic care home staff and residents in England are already eligible for testing, and testing is prioritised for care homes that look after the over 65s. The new digital portal now enables care homes to register for the delivery and collection of test kits directly.

Workforce recruitment

Today's announcement also aims to further boost the social care workforce and work has begun to attract thousands more people into social care over the next 3 months through the new national social care recruitment campaign.

NHS support will see nurse returners being deployed to care homes through the Bringing Back Staff programme, as well providing infection control nurses to lead a 'train the trainers' approach for care homes available to every area in England. This includes advice about the recommended approach to infection prevention control, PPE usage and testing advice. This programme commenced at the beginning of May with the offer available to every area in England.

Ruth Sutherland, Samaritans CEO, said:

We are so pleased that we can offer support to even more key

workers who are doing such critical work on the frontline. Our volunteers are ready and waiting to provide a non-judgemental listening ear and a safe space to offload, at a time when we know so many are under huge emotional strain.

All calls are completely confidential and answered by trained volunteers who will talk for as long as people want to, whilst also offering information about other sources of support that could be helpful.

Paul Johnstone, Deputy SRO for PHE COVID-19 Response at Public Health England (PHE), said:

We are delighted that the social care sector will get even more support in the form of the Social Care Fund, based on PHE research and emerging evidence from the World Health Organization. We are confident that these interventions will help to further reduce the transmission of COVID-19 and keep our care home residents and workers safe.

The excellent work carried out by Directors of Public Health and PHE's Health Protection Teams has already made a huge difference to the local response to COVID-19. We will continue working with NHS England and DHSC to provide advice and support to the sector.

Tracey Bleakley, CEO, Hospice UK said:

We welcome the commitment the government is making to ensure that the care workforce is to benefit from bereavement and trauma support. These dedicated, frontline health professionals face very difficult situations dealing with COVID-19 which can take a toll on their mental health and wellbeing. This is why Hospice UK is so pleased to be able to extend our services to those in social care.

Background information

- The scheme will cover frontline staff in England.
- As a result of this £600 million the devolved administrations will receive £113 million through the Barnett formula:
 - the Scottish Government will receive £58 million
 - the Welsh Government will receive £35 million
 - the Northern Ireland Executive will receive £20 million
- The allocation shares for each council are calculated as [Number of care home beds * Area Cost Adjustment] / England sum of [Number of care home beds * Area Cost Adjustment]. The Area Cost Adjustment reflects differences in wages and prices in different councils.
- The funding will be paid in 2 equal instalments to local authorities. We

have allocated funding to local authorities according to the number of care home beds in each area, with an adjustment to reflect the costs of operating in each area.

- We will request that 75% of the initial funding received is passed straight to care homes within the local authority's geographical area for use on infection control measures, including to care homes with whom the local authority does not have existing contracts. The second payment will be contingent on the first being used for infection control. The remaining 25% must also be used for infection control measures, however local authorities are able to allocate based on need. This may involve support for domiciliary care workforce measures. To be eligible for support from the grant, providers who do not already must complete the daily care home Capacity Tracker.
- This approach ensures that the majority of funding reaches the front line as quickly as possible, while ensuring that local authorities have the flexibility to top up where it is most needed.

Further details of the [Samaritans helpline](#) are on its website.

[Allocation table for the infection control fund for adult social care](#) (PDF, 104 KB, 5 pages)

[PM's call with Prime Minister Trudeau: 15 May 2020](#)

Press release

Prime Minister Boris Johnson had a call with Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau.



The Prime Minister spoke to his Canadian counterpart, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, today on the global response to the coronavirus pandemic.

Both leaders agreed on the importance of international collaboration on the fight against the virus, including through the G7 and Commonwealth.

They also discussed how the UK and Canada can work together to support global economic recovery and emerge stronger from this crisis.

The Prime Minister extended an invitation to Prime Minister Trudeau to attend the upcoming virtual Global Vaccine Summit, and thanked him for Canada's recent pledge to Gavi.

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[Coronavirus: update on bathing season 2020](#)

On Wednesday (13 May 2020) the government [announced](#) that people would be able to spend more time outside both for exercise and recreation in England.

As part of this revised guidance, you can now go swimming in either lakes or the sea provided that you observe [social distancing guidelines](#). You cannot however use public indoor or outdoor pools.

This year's bathing season runs from 15 May to 30 September 2020.

England has high standards of water quality at its bathing waters, with 98.3% of bathing waters passing the minimum standard last year in England. Of these, 71% of bathing waters were classified as 'Excellent', the highest water quality standard.

The latest classifications for over 400 designated bathing waters in England can be found through the Environment Agency's ['Find a bathing water'](#) site. Members of the public can also access the Environment Agency's daily pollution risk forecasting service during this time which alerts people to any temporary reductions in water quality.

Guidance on visiting bathing waters

There are no restrictions on how far you can travel to get to bathing waters. However, you cannot visit and stay overnight at a holiday home or second home. Before travelling, check local advice on which public spaces are open and whether public amenities are available.

Visiting may be advised against if local authorities report an influx of visitors which means that people cannot safely observe social distancing guidance. If you are concerned about visiting public places, please read the [government guidance](#) for advice on staying safe in open spaces.

Claire Hughes, Director of Her Majesty's Coastguard, said:

In England, now more than ever, people need to respect the sea and the coast. Whether you're local or not, whatever your ability or experience in your chosen sport or leisure activity, the sea can still catch you out and be unmerciful when it does.

The majority of beaches will not be lifeguarded. If you get into trouble call 999 and ask for the Coastguard and we will come to your aid. But coronavirus hasn't gone away and we all need to follow the rules. Remember your choices might put people, including yourself and frontline responders, at risk. Take extra care in these extraordinary times.

Update on bathing water sampling

This year, due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, the Environment Agency has temporarily paused non-essential work, including sampling to help slow the spread of coronavirus and maintain the ability to provide essential services.

This temporary suspension of bathing water sampling will not affect bathing water quality. More information can be found on the [Environment Agency website](#).

Stay updated on the latest [government guidance on social distancing](#) before visiting public places. The Cabinet Office has also published the following: [Coronavirus outbreak FAQs: what you can and can't do](#).

People living in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are advised to follow the latest advice issued by their relevant local authorities.

[PM call with Taoiseach Leo Varadkar: 15 May 2020](#)

Press release

Prime Minister Boris Johnson spoke to Irish Taoiseach Leo Varadkar.



The Prime Minister spoke to Irish Taoiseach Leo Varadkar this afternoon.

They discussed the UK and Ireland's approaches to tackling coronavirus and agreed on the importance of continued cooperation going forward, given the closeness of our two countries.

On the UK's intention to impose quarantine restrictions on international travellers, the Prime Minister emphasised that there would be exemptions to these measures to respect the Common Travel Area.

The two leaders also spoke about the latest round of UK-EU negotiations. The Prime Minister said the UK will continue to work hard to reach an agreement and continues to believe that this is possible.

The Prime Minister and Taoiseach looked forward to meeting again once the pandemic is over, and to building stronger links between the UK and Ireland.

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