

[Online isolation notes launched – providing proof of coronavirus absence from work](#)

Isolation notes will provide employees with evidence for their employers that they have been advised to self-isolate due to coronavirus, either because they have symptoms or they live with someone who has symptoms, and so cannot work.

As isolation notes can be obtained without contacting a doctor, this will reduce the pressure on GP surgeries and prevent people needing to leave their homes.

For the first seven days off work, employees can self-certify so they don't need any evidence for their employer. After that, employers may ask for evidence of sickness absence. Where this is related to having symptoms of coronavirus or living with someone who has symptoms, the isolation note can be used to provide evidence of the advice to self-isolate.

People who need to claim Universal Credit or [Employment and Support Allowance](#) because of coronavirus will not be required to produce a fit note or an isolation note. More details on coronavirus and claiming benefits can be found [here](#).

The notes can be accessed through the [NHS website](#) and [NHS 111 online](#). After answering a few questions, an isolation note will be emailed to the user. If they don't have an email address, they can have the note sent to a trusted family member or friend, or directly to their employer. The service can also be used to generate an isolation note on behalf of someone else.

The isolation note service has been commissioned by NHSX and built by NHS Digital.

Health and Social Care Secretary, Matt Hancock, said:

It is absolutely vital we do everything we can to ease the burden on our healthcare professionals, allowing them to spend as much time as possible with those patients that need them most.

Digital isolation notes will provide reassurance to those self-isolating and their employers while also reducing the pressure on our NHS, so they can continue doing all they can to protect the people of this country and save lives.

The isolation note service can be accessed via the [111 online coronavirus service](#) or [NHS.UK/coronavirus](#) as well as via the NHS app.

New Build Developments: Delivering gigabit-capable connections

Government is clear that the provision of gigabit-capable connectivity to new build developments is a crucial element of meeting our ambitious broadband targets. The Government has therefore secured commitments from network operators, outlining their commitment to work with housing developers on providing gigabit-capable connections to all new build developments across the UK.

- Contribute a minimum amount to the cost of connection, that will be at least £500 and in some cases as high as £1,400
- Work with developers to ensure premises which cannot be provided with a gigabit-capable connection within the above overall cost envelope can be connected with the next best technology that could be provided within the cap
- Openreach has published a new price structure that reduces the costs developers pay for connecting two premise developments from £3,100 to £2,000, bringing all developments of two premises or more within our proposed cost cap
- Openreach have also publicly committed to connect all new build developments over 20 premises for free, reducing this from their current offer of 30 premises

These commitments alongside the amendments to the Building Regulations 2010 to require all new build developments to have gigabit broadband outlined in the [consultation response](#) will ensure that 99% of all new homes will be able to be built with gigabit-capable broadband.

We have also had initial and positive discussions on similar commitments with smaller network operators and will seek to formalise more commitments and publish them here in advance of this legislation coming into force.

The UK completes training of Somali National Army battalion in Baidoa

The first battalion of the Somali National Army (SNA) 8th Brigade has graduated from infantry training at the UK-supported training facility in Baidoa, the capital of Southwest State in Somalia. Over 400 SNA soldiers have been trained over 12 months forming the first battalion.

Through the training provided by British military personnel, the Somali National Army (SNA) troops learnt about gained skills in offensive and defensive operations, basic command and control, checkpoints, leadership, live firing, combat first aid, the law of armed conflict, human rights and gender, among other skills that will help them conduct effective security operations in the country.

The UK through the Conflict Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) is also supporting Somalia to strengthen its security institutions and governance through the provision of training facilities. At the graduation ceremony, the UK handed over a military barrack that will house up to 450 Somali troops and act as the military headquarters for the 8th Brigade in South West State.

The first company of SNA troops graduated in April last year and this year's graduating troops mark the third company to have successfully completed training in South West State. The soldiers are expected to boost the national army numbers as they battle alongside African Union forces against Al Shabaab.

Speaking during the graduation of the first UK trained battalion, the British Ambassador to Somalia, Ben Fender said:

The UK is helping to develop the core of a strong professional army that can keep Baidoa and its surrounding areas safer. We have already seen our trainees achieve vital operational successes and we are delighted to be investing for the future through the new barracks.

The UK is supporting Somalia to strengthen its security institutions and governance to deliver effective operations. One way to do this is through the provision of crucial infrastructure such as barracks. "The ambition was to complete a full Brigade of three Battalions (nine companies) within a year. We have also supported the construction of an excellent training facility as well as a barracks and a firing range that is now able to train a

new company every eight to ten weeks.

President of Southwest state, Abdiiaziz Hassan Mohamed 'Laftagareen' said:

The new company will help the Somali National Army to conduct effective operations in the region to counter Al Shabaab.

The Commander of British Forces in Somalia, Colonel Tony Casey said:

Today marks a special day as it is the culmination of a number of activities we have undertaken in support of Somalia's security sector reform to help promote long-term stability and security for the benefit of all Somalis. We are excited that the new trainees will move to a new UK supported military barracks. The UK also handed over vehicles, uniforms and equipment to support SNA to operate in the most effective manner.

The graduation ceremony was presided over by the British Ambassador to Somalia Ben Fender and attended by South West State president Abdiiaziz Mohamed Laftagareen, Somalia's Minister of Defence Hassan Ali Mohamed, State Minister Abdullahi Hamud and senior civilian and military officials from the Federal Government and Southwest State.

During the event, the troops demonstrated their newly-acquired skills.

In August last year, the UK opened the Baidoa Security Training Centre (BSTC) including a firing range to support the Somali National Army and promote long-term stability and security in Somalia.

Reduced rail timetable agreed to protect train services and staff

- government and rail operators across the UK agree reductions in service levels following reduced passenger demand as people change their travel patterns to help tackle spread of COVID-19
- move will keep core services running to ensure those who need to get to

- work, including emergency services and NHS can continue to do so
- joint decision also enables important freight services to continue, ensuring sector can support movement of goods and supplies while passenger services continue for those most at need

The government and the UK rail industry have agreed a plan that will see a gradual reduction in train services across the country to reflect lower passenger demand, while keeping vital rail services running.

Operators will continue to run core services ensuring people remain able to get to work, can travel to access medical appointments and the flow of goods continues across the UK.

The move reflects a decrease in passenger demand as people stop all unnecessary travel and decrease non-essential social contact in line with government advice to help stop the spread of the virus. Running reduced services will also help protect the welfare of frontline railway staff essential for day-to-day operations.

Rail services will be reduced from Monday 23rd March and kept under review, with operators providing clear communications to ensure passengers who need to travel are well-informed of the changes.

There will be a gradual move towards introducing reduced service levels on wide parts of the network over the longer term. To minimise disruption, services will be reduced progressively across the network over the coming days.

The plan will also ensure key freight services can continue to move around the country, allowing vital goods to continue to be shipped where needed.

Secretary of State for Transport Grant Shapps, said:

We are taking decisive action to protect the public which means reducing travel for the time being, whilst still ensuring keyworker heroes can get to their jobs to keep this nation running.

For passengers in crucial roles, including essential workers in our emergency services and NHS, alongside people who need to attend medical appointments or care for loved ones, these changes protect the services they rely on.

Our railways are at the heart of this country's transport links, and we continue to work closely with the industry to develop measures that protects operators in these challenging times.

Robert Nisbet, Director of Nations and Regions at the Rail Delivery Group, which represents train operators and Network Rail, said:

At a time of extraordinary national challenge, the measures rail

companies are putting in place with government will preserve services so that we can continue to get key workers to where they need to be, deliver food to supermarkets and get fuel to power stations.

This is not a decision we take lightly. However, implementing these measures now will mean that we can continue to operate trains over a prolonged period with fewer railway workers, who like so many others are to be commended for putting the needs of the country first, and whose safety remains front of mind.

We are monitoring demand closely and should it become necessary in the weeks ahead, we will adjust services and timetables to ensure they're being delivered to best effect where they're needed most, in accordance with our plan. We would advise anybody who has to travel to check the time of their train on the National Rail Enquiries website before they set out.

The government has been working together with the operators, freight groups and trade unions to ensure there is a collective focus during this crucial time and to ensure all areas of the industry and its people have the support needed.

Similar measures have been agreed by the Scottish and Welsh governments to ensure this package is implemented across operators in Scotland and Wales. Transport for London has already announced a similar reduction in usual services.

Scottish Transport Secretary Michael Matheson said:

Following discussions with rail industry partners, passenger services will see a reduction as we continue to tackle the coronavirus.

We know that rail provides an important service in moving passengers and goods around the country. However, we will reach a point where travel is reduced to essential journeys only.

Moving to a reduced timetable will not only help ensure some passenger services continue to run, it will enable freight to be prioritised so goods and emergency supplies such as medicines can be moved around the country.

Constructive dialogue has been held with rail unions with discussion focused on protecting rail staff while they make a significant contribution to keeping passengers and goods moving as much as possible in these challenging circumstances.

Ken Skates AM, Welsh Government Minister for Economy and Transport, said:

In Wales the railway is crucial to ensuring key workers like nurses, police officers and firefighters can get to work and also provides a vital supply line for our power stations and supermarkets.

From Monday, Transport for Wales will be moving to a timetable designed to reflect the reduced number of travellers, whilst also providing transport for those key workers. This action aims to balance the current significantly reduced levels of passenger demand as people follow the guidelines to socially isolate with the need to reduce the number of people required to run the network.

This contingency measure will help to ensure there are enough staff to keep services running over the coming weeks and months.

[Coelleira report and flyer published](#)

Our report on the loss of the long-liner Coelleira on Ve Skerries, a low-lying reef off the west coast of the Shetland Islands, Scotland on 4 August 2019, is now published.

The report contains details of what happened, the subsequent actions taken and recommendations made: [read more](#).

A [safety flyer](#) to the fishing industry summarising the accident and detailing the safety lessons learned, has also been produced.

Press enquiries

Press enquiries during office hours 01932 440015

Press enquiries out of hours 020 7944 4292