

Our response to coronavirus

Since the global outbreak of covid-19 our business continuity teams have been preparing for a wide range of scenarios, from a small number of confirmed cases in our business to a wider outbreak.

Leading this response is director of environment, safety and security, Mark Neate. He said:

Our response has been deliberately structured so that we have dedicated resources to manage the ongoing situation while also maintaining our management and control of the Sellafield site and our nuclear facilities.

Employees are following the guidance provided by the Government and the NHS with regards to self-isolation and social distancing.

Mark added:

We have developed plans for remote working but given the number of employees we have this isn't a simple task. Where people can work from home this is being managed through line management.

As you would imagine, many of our roles simply cannot be delivered from home. We have a critical mission at Sellafield and so our response must ensure the continued safety and security of our workforce, the public and the protection of the environment.

I want to personally thank those who continue to support this mission and – just as importantly – support their colleagues, either by working with them for an extended period or by making themselves available to work the next shift. Thanks to their efforts, Sellafield and our nuclear assets have remained safe and secure throughout.

We have taken some precautionary actions on the site, including the controlled shutdown of the Magnox Reprocessing Plant.

The reprocessing plant is approaching its 60th year and is a complex chemical facility designed to process and separate plutonium and uranium. Turning it off quickly in a response to reduced manning could create unnecessary maintenance or repair work, whereas a controlled shutdown leaves the plant in the optimum condition to be restarted.

Additional response measures so far also include:

- Making access to the site easier for those who need to get into Sellafield to do their role
 - Enhanced cleaning in high footfall areas of the site and our offices
 - Changes to our canteens to encourage social distancing
 - Setting up a dedicated helpline and email account for employees
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Schools, colleges and early years settings to close

After schools shut their gates on Friday afternoon, they will remain closed until further notice except for children of key workers and vulnerable children, as part of the country's ongoing response to coronavirus.

Examples of these workers include NHS staff, police and supermarket delivery drivers who need to be able to go to work to support the country's fight to tackle coronavirus. Vulnerable children include those who have a social worker and those with Education, Health and Care Plans – a legal document that describes a child's special educational needs and the support they require.

Children who do not fall into these groups should remain at home with appropriate care.

Where schools are unable to look after these children, local authorities will work with the Department for Education's regional teams to ensure an alternative option is available in the same area.

Nurseries, private schools and sixth forms should also follow this guidance. We will provide financial support for these settings as required.

Where possible, we would encourage settings to also look after key workers' children and vulnerable children throughout the Easter holidays.

The scientific advice shows that these settings are safe for this small number of children to continue attending – but asking others to stay away will help us to slow the spread.

To lift the pressure on schools themselves and to allow them to focus on supporting those children who need it most, Ofsted will cease all inspections of schools and colleges with immediate effect.

We will not go ahead with primary school assessments or secondary exams this summer, and we will not be publishing performance tables.

We will work with sector and Ofqual to ensure children get the qualifications they need.

We recognise that many special schools and residential settings will need to continue to look after their pupils.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Fighting Coronavirus and protecting the vulnerable and our NHS are the Government's top priorities right now. That's why we are asking schools, nurseries and colleges to close – except for vulnerable children and the children of key workers.

We are facing increasingly extraordinary circumstances, but by asking schools to support our key workers and vulnerable children I am confident we will help beat this virus.

I am deeply grateful for the civic spirit and dedication of everyone working in education, and I will continue to provide my full support throughout this crisis.

To support children eligible for free school meals, schools will be able to purchase meals or vouchers for supermarkets or local shops.

The government has also confirmed that the total value of vouchers offered to each eligible child per week will exceed the rate it pays to schools for free school meals, recognising that families will not be buying food in bulk and may therefore incur higher costs. The final amounts will be confirmed shortly.

Effective immediately, schools will be able to order vouchers directly from supermarkets or shops in their communities to be emailed or printed and posted to families, and they will have their costs covered by the Department for Education. Guidance for schools will be published shortly.

We know that many universities and other higher education institutions are already taking necessary steps to keep their staff and students safe. We are confident vice-chancellors are making the right decisions and the Department for Education continues to support them in doing so.

To support nurseries at this time, the Chancellor has also decided that they will also now be eligible for a business rates holiday for one year. That means non-local authority providers of childcare will pay no business rates in 2020-21, from 1 April.

Local authorities will be fully compensated for the cost of this measure. We are applying the Barnett formula to this additional support in England.

Guidance for local authorities on the application of the holiday will be published by MHCLG shortly.

Parole Board Chief Executive's blog – March 2020

Given the unprecedented times we find ourselves in, I felt it only right to personally outline the Parole Board's approach at this time. Where possible, the Parole Board is continuing to carry out planned hearings in line with government advice. Guidance and information on Coronavirus (Covid-19) is still coming in so we must be prepared to reconsider our plans at any time.

There are members of the Parole Board and key members of parole hearings who have had to take the decision to self-isolate following public health advice. This, inevitably, has had a knock-on effect on our ability to hold certain future hearings. I would like to pay tribute to the members and other people who are going into prison every day to ensure we keep cases moving. The decisions we make have huge consequences.

Rest assured we are working tirelessly behind the scenes to find new and innovative ways in which to progress hearings, however we must put the health and safety of everyone involved in the parole system first. We are exploring every possible avenue to ensure the maximum number of cases can be progressed.

Providing the most effective and safe service we can during this period is essential so, acting on advice, we will seek to maintain hearings for as long as we can. However, it is almost inevitable access to prisons will be impacted in the coming days and weeks. This is likely to mean that some cases may need to be slowed down or postponed but we will keep all parties informed and updated on plans.

My executive team is meeting daily to review and test our business continuity plans. We are in an unpredictable and fast-moving situation and we will have to make very swift decisions to ensure business continues as efficiently as possible. We are doing everything we can. Please stay safe.

PM statement on coronavirus: 18 March 2020

Good afternoon. And thanks for coming or for indeed tuning in to these daily updates. I want to introduce, I'm sure you know Jenny Harries, Deputy Chief Medical Officer for England, and you know Sir Patrick Vallance, Chief Scientific Advisor.

I want to tell you where we got to in our national fightback against the

coronavirus. Today the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies met to discuss the latest evidence on the spread of the virus and the effects of the measures we have already taken to slow its spread. And Patrick is going to update us in a second about that.

I want to repeat that everyone – everyone – must follow the advice to protect themselves and their families, but also – more importantly – to protect the wider public. So stay at home for seven days if you think you have the symptoms. Remember the two key symptoms are high temperature, a continuous new cough.

Whole household to stay at home for 14 days if one member in that household thinks he/she has the symptoms. Avoid all unnecessary gatherings – pubs, clubs, bars, restaurants, theatres and so on and work from home if you can. Wash your hands.

And we have already announced in the last few days we will massively scale up our testing capacity in the weeks ahead so we hit 25,000 tests a day.

A huge public information campaign is being rolled out so people get all the information they need to protect themselves and others.

We are asking retired healthcare professionals to come back and help us cope, help the NHS to cope, with this unprecedented challenge.

And we will continue as we have from the beginning to do the right thing at the right time and to follow the best scientific advice.

And we come today to the key issue of schools where we have been consistently advised that there is an important trade off. And so far the judgment of our advisers has been that closing schools is actually of limited value in slowing the spread of the epidemic.

And that is partly because counterintuitively schools are actually very safe environments. And in this disease and epidemic children and young people are much less vulnerable.

And hitherto the advice has been that we should keep schools open if possible in order to reduce the pressure on the NHS and on all other public services. But I think you'll agree I have always been very clear that this is a balanced judgment and one that we have kept under constant review.

So looking at the curve of the disease and looking at where we are now – we think now that we must apply downward pressure, further downward pressure on that upward curve by closing the schools.

So I can announce today and Gavin Williamson making statement now in House of Commons that after schools shut their gates from Friday afternoon, they will remain closed for most pupils – for the vast majority of pupils- until further notice. I will explain what I mean by the vast majority of pupils.

The objective is to slow the spread of the virus and we judge it is the right moment to do that.

But of course, as I've always said, we also need to keep the NHS going and to treat the number of rising cases. So we need health workers who are also parents to continue to go to work.

And we need other critical workers with children to keep doing their jobs too – from police officers who are keeping us safe to the supermarket delivery drivers, social care workers who look after the elderly and who are so vital. We will be setting out more details shortly about who we mean in these groups.

So we therefore need schools to make provision for the children of these key workers who would otherwise be forced to stay home. And they will also need to look after the most vulnerable children.

This will mean there will of course be far fewer children in schools and that will help us to slow the spread of the disease. And these measures are crucial to make sure the critical parts of the economy keep functioning and public services keep functioning.

So we are simultaneously asking nurseries and private schools to do the same, and we are providing financial support where it is needed. We are making provisions to supply meals and vouchers for children eligible for free school meals. And where some schools are already doing this, I want to make it clear we will reimburse the cost. And of course this does mean that exams will not take place as planned in May and June. Though we will make sure that pupils get the qualifications they need and deserve for their academic career.

Now I know that these steps will not be easy for parents or teachers. And for many parents, this will be frustrating, and it will make it harder for them to go out to work.

And of course that is one of the reasons we haven't wanted to go ahead and that's why we are working now on further measures to ensure that we support not just businesses but also individuals and their families to keep our economy going as Rishi Sunak the Chancellor outlined yesterday.

I also need to remind parents that, as we have already advised, children should not be left with older grandparents, or older relatives, who may be particularly vulnerable or fall into some of the vulnerable groups and I know that will be difficult too. And I want to thank families for their sacrifice at this difficult time. I want to thank whole country for the efforts people are making to comply with these measures.

I particularly want to thank the teachers, head teachers and all the support staff who keep schools going who will make these exceptional arrangements work, for the benefit of us all.

By looking after the children of key workers they will be a critical part of our fightback against Coronavirus. As I have said, we will take the right steps at the right time, guided by the science.

We believe the steps we have already taken, together with those I am announcing today, are already slowing the spread of the disease.

But we will not hesitate to go further, and faster, in the days and weeks ahead.

And we will do whatever it takes to so that we beat it together.

[Coronavirus – a further statement](#)

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