

Communities Secretary's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 2 May 2020

Good afternoon,

Welcome to the Coronavirus press conference from Downing Street.

I'm joined by Dr Jenny Harries, Deputy Chief Medical Officer for England.

Today's data shows that:

- 1,129,907 tests for coronavirus have now been carried out in the UK, including 105,937 tests carried out yesterday.
- 182,260 people have tested positive, that's an increase of 4,806 cases since yesterday.
- 14,695 people are currently in hospital with coronavirus, down 15,111 from the previous day.
- And sadly, of those tested positive for coronavirus, across all settings, 28,131 have now died. That's an increase of 621 fatalities since yesterday.

These are heart-breaking losses for every family affected, and our thoughts and prayers are with their families and their friends.

Jenny will provide an update on the latest data on Coronavirus.

But first, as Communities Secretary, I want to update on the steps we are taking to protect some of the most vulnerable people in our society.

As the Prime Minister set out this week, we have now passed the peak of this virus.

And he will provide more details on how we will address the second phase of this battle next week.

We all know that the restrictive measures – as necessary and as lifesaving as they are – are difficult for everyone.

All of you watching at home this afternoon have made sacrifices big and small, and I want to thank you once again for all that you are doing.

You are helping us as a country to turn the tide on coronavirus.

But for some in our society these measures involve sacrifices that none of us would wish anyone to bear.

For victims of domestic abuse, it means being trapped in a nightmare.

The true evil of domestic abuse is that it leaves vulnerable people, including children, living in fear in the very place where they should feel most safe and secure – inside their own home.

Though domestic violence can leave physical marks, the true extent of the inflicted pain is much deeper than those marks – it can be invisible, these are emotional scars.

Scars that may never heal and which can even pass to the next generation, whose young eyes see things that they never should.

And hear things that none of us would wish our children to witness.

As a father of three girls, I cannot even imagine women and young children being put in this situation.

But they are, and we must be alive to the reality of what is happening on all too many homes across the country.

I want us to defend the rights of those women and children wherever we can, and that is what we are going to do.

And this is not a crime inflicted solely on women: it affects men too.

This Government has already prioritised tackling domestic abuse.

The Domestic Abuse Bill, which had its second reading in Parliament last week, is a landmark piece of legislation which will create the first ever legal definition of domestic abuse.

And this is important because it holds those responsible to account and gives those suffering at the hands of others more confidence that action will be taken and perpetrators brought to justice.

Today, I can confirm that through the Domestic Abuse Bill, the government will also be ensuring that victims of domestic violence get the 'priority need' status they need to access local housing services much more easily.

This is a fully funded commitment which will mean that no victim of domestic violence has to make the unbearable choice between staying somewhere where they know is unsafe or becoming homeless.

This Government has been clear that we are determined to break the silence that surrounds victims, to stamp out the stigma and strengthen our support for survivors.

We have already announced an extra £15 million to strengthen our support, and an extra £16 million is going directly to refuge services.

But we recognise that the extra pressures that are being created due to COVID-19 and that necessitates more support.

While the necessary social distancing measures remain in place, it is harder than before for victims of domestic abuse to reach out to their friends, to their family, to colleagues, and neighbours for the support that they urgently need.

Today I can announce a package of over £76 million in new funding to support the most vulnerable in society during the pandemic.

This funding will help charities support survivors of domestic and sexual abuse, it will support vulnerable children and their families and victims of modern slavery.

This additional support will ensure more safe spaces and accommodation for survivors of domestic abuse and their children and the recruitment of additional counsellors for victims of sexual violence.

And this funding will also help front line charities to be able to offer different ways of supporting those in need, including through virtual or phone based services.

We know that some refuges have had to reduce or even to cancel their services they would want to provide during this pandemic.

This funding will help them to meet the challenges posed in this national emergency and to continue to help those that desperately need support.

I'd like to say a word of thanks to domestic abuse charities who are doing so much at this time to help so many people.

The Women's Aid refuge in my constituency is one example.

I'd like to thank Marlene and her amazing team in Newark. People like that do incredible work and deserve all our thanks and gratitude now more than ever before.

Where refuges don't have enough capacity to support those in need during the pandemic, some have asked if they could use hotels or other accommodation nearby on a temporary basis.

For example, as move-on accommodation, where they judge it to be safe and appropriate to do so. We will work with refuges to make this option available to them, if they judge it to be the right one where it's necessary.

And thank you also to pharmacies, such as Boots, who are providing a safe space for victims of domestic abuse in some of their shops, and are training more of their staff to be able to support those people when they come into the stores, so they can safely provide support and contact services for help and advice.

For any victims of domestic abuse watching at home this afternoon, let me say

once again that you are not alone.

You do not have to stay at home. You can and should leave the home if you are in danger.

Victims should call 999 if in an emergency or if you are in danger and unable to talk call 999 then press 55.

Our outstanding police will be there for you. They will help you.

And if you need support please call the national domestic abuse helpline on 0808 2000 247 at any time.

Secondly, we have also been working with councils and charities to protect those sleeping who have been sleeping on our streets; a group particularly vulnerable to COVID19.

We set out to bring people in from the streets.

So far, more than 5,400 rough sleepers known to councils have been offered safe accommodation in just under a month – ensuring some of the most vulnerable people can stay safe during the pandemic.

This means that over 90% of rough sleepers known to councils have been offered accommodation where they can self-isolate during the crisis.

This country is viewed around the world as having taken one of the most intensive and successful approaches to protecting rough sleepers during the pandemic.

This was the right thing to do.

By working with charities, local council, churches, faith groups and volunteers, we have helped to protect thousands of lives.

I am extremely grateful to everyone who has been involved in this phenomenal national effort.

Today I am announcing that Dame Louise Casey, who is already leading a review into rough sleeping and advising the Government on ending it within this Parliament, has been appointed by the Prime Minister and I to spearhead this new Government initiative and she will lead a new taskforce.

In this role, she will oversee our national effort to ensure that thousands of rough sleepers now in safer accommodation continue to receive the physical and mental health support they need, while they self-isolate during the pandemic.

And she will work hand-in-hand with councils and with other groups across the country to plan how we can ensure as many people as possible can move into long-term, sustainable and safe accommodation they deserve once the pandemic is over.

We are determined that as few people as possible return to life on the streets, and I can think of nobody better than Louise to help us to achieve this.

This is a major challenge and I don't pretend that this second phase will be easy or that we will succeed in every case.

But we will apply the same energy and commitment and determination to this national effort as we did to the first.

And I am certain that the charities, the councils and the volunteers the people across the length and breadth of the country that have achieved so much in the last month will do the same job again.

Thirdly, and in closing, I'd like to update you on our shielding programme.

For those who have been identified by the NHS as being extremely clinically vulnerable due to underlying health conditions, that's now 1.8 million people in England alone.

They have been asked to stay at home with no face-to-face contact outside their household, except for their carers, for those people in the shielding group who don't have family or friends to support them, we've offered to provide a basic weekly package of food and essentials.

I'm delighted to say today that we expect that the 1 millionth shielding package will be delivered in the next few days.

This service is entirely without precedent – nothing on this scale has been attempted in this country at least since the Second World War.

I am incredibly proud of the team who helped us deliver it.

I have loved reading the emails I have received from people who have got the boxes and seeing the photos that have posted on social media.

I said at the start of this process that there are many people who we are asking to be at home for a prolonged period of time as a result of the virus.

Not least in the shielded category but that we as a Government and as a country that they may be alone at home but that they shouldn't feel that that they are on their own.

You are not, and never will be.

[Emergency funding to support most](#)

vulnerable in society during pandemic

- More than £76 million extra funding to support most vulnerable in society during pandemic
- Funding for charities to support survivors of domestic and sexual abuse, vulnerable children and their families and victims of modern slavery
- Domestic abuse survivors to automatically qualify for priority need under council duty to relieve homelessness

An unprecedented £76 million package of support to ensure the most vulnerable in society get the support they need during the pandemic has been announced by Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick today (Saturday 2 May).

This funding will support survivors of domestic abuse, sexual violence and modern slavery as well as ensuring vulnerable children and young people continue to get the help they need.

A change to the rules will also mean that those fleeing domestic abuse and facing homelessness as a result will be automatically considered as priority by their council for housing – ensuring more survivors of domestic abuse have access to a safe home.

These crimes should never happen, but the government understands that the instruction to stay at home will be a huge cause of anxiety to some people. We recognise that front line charities have struggled to continue some of their work during the pandemic and at the same time, there may be increased risks for people trapped in abusive or exploitative situations

It is right that these vulnerable people get access to the help they need, which will include additional support for survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence, and more safe spaces and accommodation for survivors of domestic abuse and their children. Anyone at risk should contact the police.

This funding will also help front line charities to be able to offer different ways of supporting those in need, including through virtual or telephone-based services, as well as providing direct support to families of disabled children through the provision of goods including household appliances and sensory toys.

Today's funding is part of comprehensive measures to support vulnerable people through the pandemic and the Government is working closely with councils, charities and other partners to ensure they get the support they need.

Communities Secretary, Robert Jenrick MP, said:

It is essential that the most vulnerable people in our communities continue to get the vital support they need during this pandemic.

This multi-million-pound package is a boost for charities working on front line to provide often lifesaving support or services at this unprecedented time.

This includes essential support for domestic abuse victims, living in fear in the place where they should feel most safe – their home.

Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak said:

Protecting the most vulnerable in our society is crucial in these difficult times. Whilst staying at home for a prolonged period of time is a challenge for us all, for some it poses a different kind of struggle, which takes place behind closed doors.

For survivors of domestic abuse, sexual violence and modern slavery, this funding will ensure they can continue to receive the support they desperately need to rebuild their lives, whether that's safe accommodation or specialist counselling.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

From day one of this national health emergency, we have been working across government, law enforcement and charities, to safeguard the most vulnerable people from abuse.

I'm delighted that together we can provide this multi-million pound funding to help ensure vital services remain accessible to victims.

Lord Chancellor and Justice Secretary Robert Buckland QC MP said:

Domestic abuse and sexual violence are devastating crimes and now, more than ever, victims should know that they are not alone.

Throughout the pandemic, this government has made protecting those at risk of abuse a priority and this important new investment will

ensure that vital support services are available when needed.

Despite these challenging times, we will always do everything in our power to bring perpetrators to justice and stand by those who have experienced such horrific crimes.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

My absolute priority is the safety and security of vulnerable children, and supporting them throughout this pandemic. As we take action to overcome this unprecedented situation, we all must work together to keep children safe.

This financial commitment will help those on the frontline continue their vital work in communities across the country.

Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden said:

Our brilliant charities are vital to the national effort to beat coronavirus and this investment will provide much needed support for some of the most vulnerable people in Britain.

This is the first allocation of the unprecedented £750 million sum pledged by the government so that charities on the front line are able to help those in need right now.

This funding is coming from the £750 million package of support for charities announced by the Chancellor last month, to ensure they can continue their vital work during the coronavirus outbreak.

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport has led the allocation of funding to support charities providing key services to help vulnerable people during the crisis. Further announcements on allocations will be made soon.

Today's funding update includes:

Vulnerable children: A total of £34.15 million will support work to safeguard vulnerable children including children with disabilities, those who are critically ill, care leavers and children in the early years. Funding will also allow charities to offer support services in new ways, using remote working and technology solutions, for example, to help tackle criminal threats and mitigate the risks to vulnerable children and young people during

the coronavirus pandemic

Domestic abuse survivors: The announcement includes £28 million to help survivors of domestic abuse and their children by providing more safe spaces, accommodation and access to support services during the coronavirus outbreak.

Survivors of sexual violence: £10 million has been announced to support victims of sexual violence access advice and support, through the funding of technology to enable charities to offer services remotely. A further £3 million per annum until 2022 will also be invested in the recruitment of more Independent Sexual Violence Advisors across the country.

Survivors of modern slavery: £ 1.73 million will provide emergency support to modern slavery charities who have been impacted by the coronavirus outbreak. This funding will go towards individuals supported through the Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract and will allow victims to stay in government-funded safe accommodation for the next three months, access financial assistance, access support services remotely, and ensure we can manage additional demand on the services during this period.

Total package:

The funding is made up as follows:

- The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government will be providing £10m for safe accommodation services. This funding applies to England. The announcement regarding automatic priority consideration for housing applies to England.
- The Department for Education will provide £26.4 million to support vulnerable children, including support for families of disabled children and working to safeguard vulnerable children including care leavers and children in the early years. This funding applies to England, except for funding for Childline, which will apply to the UK.
- The Ministry of Justice will provide £25 million to help victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence in the community access support services during the coronavirus outbreak, and a further £3m per annum investment in Independent Sexual Violence Advisers until 2022. This funding applies to England and Wales.
- The Home Office will be providing £3.8 million for community-based domestic abuse services and modern slavery services, and for added support for modern slavery charities who have been impacted by the coronavirus outbreak. The Home Office will be providing £7.8 million in emergency support for charities helping vulnerable children who have been impacted by the coronavirus outbreak. This includes children at risk of sexual abuse and criminal exploitation. This funding applies to

[Dame Louise Casey to spearhead government taskforce on rough sleeping during pandemic](#)

- New taskforce to advise Government on next steps of emergency response to support vulnerable rough sleepers during the pandemic;
- Team of experts to advise councils on plans to support rough sleepers into long-term, safe accommodation once lockdown is lifted – preventing the vulnerable from returning to the streets;
- Over 90% of rough sleepers known to councils at the beginning of the crisis have now been offered accommodation where they can self-isolate.

A specialist taskforce has been created to lead the next phase of the Government's support for rough sleepers during the pandemic.

Spearheaded by Dame Louise Casey, the taskforce will work hand-in-hand with councils across the country on plans to ensure rough sleepers can move into long-term, safe accommodation once the immediate crisis is over – ensuring as few people as possible return to life on the streets.

The taskforce will also ensure the thousands of rough sleepers now in accommodation continue to receive the physical and mental health support they need over the coming weeks while they continue to self-isolate from the virus.

Over 90% of rough sleepers known to councils at the beginning of the crisis have now been offered accommodation where they can remain safe during the crisis – helping protect themselves and others from contracting the virus.

This has been backed by £3.2 million in targeted funding to help councils get as many people off the streets as possible, with a further £3.2 billion additional funding for councils to help them continue to respond to the pandemic and support their communities – including their vital work helping those sleeping rough.

Housing Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

By working closely with councils, charities, faith groups and health providers, we have offered accommodation to over 5,400 people who were sleeping rough at the beginning of the crisis: that's over 90% of known rough sleepers.

This national effort has potentially helped to protect thousands of lives.

As the country prepares for the next phase of the battle against coronavirus, Dame Louise Casey will spearhead a taskforce to provide us with expert advice and knowledge to put in place a long-term plan to stop as many vulnerable people as possible from returning to life on the streets.

Dame Louise Casey said:

The storm of Covid-19 has affected us all in many, varied and sometimes deeply tragic ways – we know that it is a virus that does not discriminate. Due to the incredible efforts by people in local councils, charities, hotel staff and the public, many rough sleepers have been brought in and off the streets.

Much has been done, and there is much still to do. We have all had to respond to this crisis with a deep resolve but also innovation – in bringing people inside, there is now a real opportunity to address the health and social needs of these individuals and if we can stop them going back to the streets. This, like so much over the last few weeks, will take a huge national effort and I'm pleased to be able to be part of that.

Dame Louise Casey will report to the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government on this work.

E3 and Netherlands Foreign Ministers Statement on World Press Freedom Day

Press release

Joint Statement by Dutch Foreign Minister Blok, French Foreign Minister Le Drian, German Foreign Minister Maas and British Foreign Secretary Raab ahead of tomorrow's World Press Freedom Day.



Today, we celebrate the crucial role journalists play around the world. This year's theme "Journalism without fear or favour" emphasises the importance of taking action to secure independent journalism as a prerequisite for a functioning democracy.

World Press Freedom Day is the opportunity to voice our support for journalists to continue providing the public with reliable, quality information – a task that has not only become more important but also much more difficult since the COVID-19 outbreak.

We must oppose all attempts by any state to use the pandemic to adopt restrictions on press freedom, silence debate, abuse journalists or spread misinformation. It is deeply concerning to see that across the world, publications are contracting and closing and journalists being made redundant because of falling revenues.

Especially in these times, we depend on independent, fact-based and reliable journalism. A free press is crucial for a comprehensive response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Only by keeping the public informed can we prevent a further spread of COVID-19.

We therefore support the UN Secretary-General's call on governments, as well as media and technology companies to counter misinformation with free, accurate, clear and evidence-based information and to avoid excessive efforts that could result in censorship of protected speech. We reiterate our support for the Information and Democracy Partnership and the Media Freedom Coalition.

We urge governments not to use the COVID-19 pandemic as a pretext to restrict press freedom and to protect journalists from harassment, threats, detention or censorship so that information can be disseminated without suppression.

We commend journalists for their important work and will continue to stand up for them and campaign for world press freedom.

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Top-up to local business grant funds scheme

News story

A discretionary fund has been set up to accommodate certain small businesses previously outside the scope of the business grant funds scheme.



The Business Secretary Alok Sharma and Minister for Regional Growth and Local Government, Simon Clarke spoke to local authorities in England yesterday to set out that up to £617 million would be made available.

This is an additional 5% uplift to the £12.33 billion funding previously announced for the Small Business Grants Fund (SBGF) and the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grants Fund (RHLGF), so up to £617 million. We will confirm the exact amount for each local authority next week.

This additional fund is aimed at small businesses with ongoing fixed property-related costs. We are asking local authorities to prioritise businesses in shared spaces, regular market traders, small charity properties that would meet the criteria for Small Business Rates Relief, and bed and breakfasts that pay council tax rather than business rates. But local authorities may choose to make payments to other businesses based on local economic need. The allocation of funding will be at the discretion of local authorities.

Businesses must be small, under 50 employees, and they must also be able to demonstrate that they have seen a significant drop of income due to Coronavirus restriction measures.

There will be three levels of grant payments. The maximum will be £25,000. There will also be grants of £10,000. local authorities will have discretion to make payments of any amount under £10,000. It will be for councils to adapt this approach to local circumstances.

Further guidance for local authorities will be set out shortly.

As of 27 April, over £7.5 billion has been paid out to over 614,000 business

properties via the SBGF and RHLGF schemes. This is over 61% of the grant funding allocated to local authorities.

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