

Major new measures to protect people at highest risk from Coronavirus

- Government urges up to 1.5 million people in England who face the highest risk of being hospitalised by the virus to shield themselves and stay at home
- People with specific underlying health conditions, including some being treated for cancer, will be contacted by the NHS this week
- Plans also unveiled to deliver groceries and medicines for those most at risk from the virus where needed

Up to 1.5 million people in England identified by the NHS as being at higher risk of severe illness if they contract coronavirus should stay at home to protect themselves, the Government urged today (Sunday 22 March).

They will receive communication shortly with detailed advice on behalf of their GP practice or specialist on how best to protect themselves.

A raft of new measures, including a helpline for the most in need of support, have been set out for those considered to be extremely vulnerable due to their medical conditions, so people know exactly how to care for themselves and others in the coming months.

It was also announced that a new Local Support System will make sure those individuals self-isolating at home and who are without a support network of friends and family will receive basic groceries. Community pharmacies will support those who need help getting their medicines delivered.

The Government is working with a partnership of the groceries industry, local government, local resilience and emergency partners, and voluntary groups, to ensure that essential items can start to be delivered as soon as possible to those who need it. The people identified as the most vulnerable in their communities will be contacted directly – including in person where necessary – as a priority.

Members of the armed forces, already in local communities helping Local Resilience Forums and local councils on their coronavirus response plans, will support this effort and are at the heart of local planning in response to this crisis.

Communities Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

Public safety and making sure that those most at risk from the virus continue to get the support they need throughout this period is the Government's top priority. People should stay at home, protect our NHS and save lives.

This will be an especially worrying time for those with serious underlying health conditions and that is why we are urgently acting

to ensure extremely vulnerable individuals are taking extra steps to shield themselves, and that the essential items they need are supplied to them.

We will ensure that vulnerable and older people in our society are left in no doubt of their importance to us and our determination to protect them as best we can. More people will be required to be by themselves at home. While they are on their own, let's guarantee that they are never alone.

Up to 1.5 million people in England currently live with conditions, or are taking medication or receiving treatment, which health experts have identified puts them at a much greater risk of developing serious complications if they get the virus, which may mean they need hospital treatment.

This includes, for example, those who have received organ transplants, are living with severe respiratory conditions such as cystic fibrosis and severe chronic bronchitis (COPD) or specific cancers like of the blood or bone marrow. And some – though not all – of those receiving certain types of drug treatments including ones which suppress the immune system – leaving the body less able to fight off the virus.

People identified as belonging to one or more of the at-risk groups will be contacted by their GP practice, specialist or both strongly advising them to stay at home for a period of at least 12 weeks.

In the first instance they will receive a letter this week and, where mobile number is known, the NHS will also send frequent text messages shortly to those in this group, to reach the most at risk as quickly as possible with advice.

These communications will set out to reassure them that their ongoing medical needs will be met by the NHS, and contain advice and guidance on how to manage their condition while self-isolating, including getting prescriptions delivered and accessing support for daily living.

For the individuals most at risk of the illness, these actions will save lives.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

We are working incredibly hard, day and night, to protect the nation's public health whilst supporting our NHS so it can continue to look after patients in need of care.

It is vital that we do everything we can to protect ourselves, our families and our friends from being impacted by the virus. But for those who are at the highest risk in our society, we have to do

even more to ensure they're kept safe.

Whether it's going shopping for a neighbour in need, or keeping inside if you know you're at risk, we all have a part to play in protecting the welfare of those who are most vulnerable.

Dr Paul Johnstone, Director at Public Health England, said:

The NHS are contacting the people who are most vulnerable to developing a very serious illness as a result of COVID-19 with specific advice to stay at home for at least 12 weeks.

If you receive a letter it is vitally important that you act on it for your own protection, don't attend any gatherings of friends or families and don't go out for shopping, leisure or travel.

Those of us who are less at risk can play our part in protecting other people by following the government's advice on social distancing and volunteering to give extra support to vulnerable people who are staying at home.

The guidance for people at the highest risk is:

- Strictly avoid contact with someone who is displaying symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19). These symptoms include high temperature and/or new and continuous cough;
- Do not leave your house for at least 12 weeks starting on Monday 22 March.
- Do not attend any gatherings. This includes gatherings of friends and families in private spaces e.g. family homes, weddings, parties and religious services.
- Do not go out for shopping, leisure or travel and, when arranging food or medication deliveries, these should be left at the door to minimise contact.
- Keep in touch using remote technology such as phone, internet, and social media.
- Do use telephone or online services to contact your GP practice or other essential services as and when you need.

Further Information

- A link to the guidance can be found [here](#).
- Full list of those falling into the extremely vulnerable group:
- Solid organ transplant recipients
- People with specific cancers
- People with cancer who are undergoing active chemotherapy or radical radiotherapy for lung cancer
- People with cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukaemia,

- lymphoma or myeloma who are at any stage of treatment
- People having immunotherapy or other continuing antibody treatments for cancer
 - People having other targeted cancer treatments which can affect the immune system, such as protein kinase inhibitors or PARP inhibitors.
 - People who have had bone marrow or stem cell transplants in the last 6 months, or who are still taking immunosuppression drugs.
 - People with severe respiratory conditions including all cystic fibrosis, severe asthma and severe COPD
 - People with rare diseases and inborn errors of metabolism that significantly increase the risk of infections (such as SCID, homozygous sickle cell disease)
 - People on immunosuppression therapies sufficient to significantly increase risk of infection
 - Women who are pregnant and who also have significant heart disease, congenital or acquired
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[Important information for British Nationals departing Argentina](#)

On 19 March, Argentina introduced a nationwide quarantine to last from midnight on Thursday 19 March to midnight on Tuesday 31 March. However, flights will continue to depart Argentina and British nationals who have already purchased tickets, and who are showing none of the symptoms of coronavirus, will be able to access the airport to catch their flights.

Once flights have been purchased, travellers should leave plenty of time to get to the airport. You should make sure you are able to show authorities:

- Proof of a booked flight (a boarding pass if possible);
 - Your passport;
 - A (printed, if possible) copy of the letter issued by the Ministry of Tourism confirming that foreign nationals are exempt from the quarantine if they are travelling to return to the UK. This letter can be found here: [Ministry note](#) (PDF, 74.1KB, 2 pages).
 - A (printed, if possible) letter issued from the British Embassy confirming that you should be allowed to travel. This letter can be found here: [Embassy Note](#) (PDF, 689KB, 1 page).
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[COVID-19 Guidance: Information for NI Businesses & Employers](#)



To help businesses and employers understand what the measures announced by the Chancellor mean for you, please use this page to navigate the latest guidance for people in Northern Ireland.

Guidance for employees

Read all [the latest guidance and frequently asked questions](#) for employees including details about statutory sick pay and Universal Credit.

Guidance for self-employed workers

The UK Government has launched a Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) which will support self-employed individuals (including members of partnerships) who have lost income due to coronavirus (COVID-19). Details on how to apply can be found [here](#).

Sickness and disability benefits

[Face-to-face assessments for all sickness and disability benefits will be temporarily suspended](#) for the next 3 months from Tuesday 17 March. No further action is required by any claimant as a result of this change. They will be contacted with advice on next steps.

Travel

[Find out all the latest travel advice and sign up for travel alerts](#) via the Foreign and Commonwealth (FCO) website.

Businesses

General guidance for employers

The UK Government has published extensive [guidance for employers](#), including details on how to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and what to do if someone is

suspected or confirmed to have the virus.

UK Government support for businesses

The UK Government has set out a package of measures to protect public services, people and businesses through this period of disruption caused by COVID-19. Businesses in Northern Ireland can access the following schemes and announcements:

- Businesses can receive government grants worth up to 80% of wages to keep workers in jobs. [The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme](#) will pay up to £2,500 per worker. From 1 July, employers can bring employees back to work that have previously been furloughed for any amount of time and any shift pattern, while still being able to claim the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme grant for their normal hours not worked. From August, the level of government grant provided through the scheme will be slowly tapered until the scheme ends in October.
- Support for businesses through [the Business Interruption Loan Scheme](#), which will provide loans of up to £5m, with no interest due for 12 months. This scheme will be delivered through the [British Business Bank](#).
- For larger businesses the [Coronavirus Large Business Interruption Loan Scheme \(CLBILS\)](#), will provide a Government guarantee of 80% to enable loans of up to £25 million for firms with an annual turnover of between £45 million and £500 million.
- For innovative companies facing financing difficulties due to the Coronavirus outbreak, the [Future Fund](#) will provide government loans to UK-based companies ranging from £125,000 to £5 million, subject to at least equal match funding from private investors.
- The [Bounce Back Loan](#) scheme will ensure that the smallest businesses can access 100% government backed loans of up to £50,000, with no interest or repayment obligations for the first 12 months.
- [Trade Credit Insurance](#): The UK government will guarantee up to £10bn of business-to-business transactions by protecting against customer defaults or payment delays. The scheme is available on a temporary basis for nine months, backdated to 1 April 2020.
- [Support for businesses who are paying sick pay to employees.](#)
- [Support for businesses paying tax.](#)

- [VAT payments for the next quarter will be deferred](#), so no business will pay any VAT for the next three months.
- Commercial tenants who cannot pay their rent because of COVID-19 will be [protected from eviction](#).
- Coronavirus (COVID-19) support is available to employers and the self-employed. You may be eligible for loans, tax relief and cash grants. Use this [business support finder](#) to see what support is available for you and your business.

Northern Ireland Executive support for businesses

Businesses in Northern Ireland can access the following NI Executive schemes and support:

- [COVID Small Business Grant](#) – A small business grant of £10,000 for all businesses with a rateable value up to £15,000. Rental properties with a sole tenant that meet the eligibility criteria may also apply. Registration for this scheme closed on Wednesday 20 May 2020.
- [Hospitality, Tourism and Retail Sectors Grant Scheme](#) – A grant of £25,000 will be provided to companies in these sectors with a rateable value from £15,001 up to £51,000. Registration for this scheme closed on Wednesday 20 May 2020.
- [NI Micro-business Hardship Fund](#): businesses with fewer than 10 employees that are not eligible for either of the above grant schemes may be able to apply for emergency funding for immediate cash-flow difficulties. This scheme is administered by Invest Northern Ireland on behalf of the Department for the Economy. The deadline for applications is Friday 12 June 2020 at 6 pm.
- [Business rates relief](#): A package of measures including a three months rates holiday to all businesses in Northern Ireland and an effective 18% reduction in the Stormont determined portion of business rates compared to 2019-20.
- [Fishing Industry](#): The Executive is supporting the fishing industry through a direct grant scheme for eligible vessels.
- [Creative Support Fund](#): A £1.5 million package to support creative projects. This has two strands. Under the [Artists Emergency Fund](#), artists whose work has been impacted may apply for grants of up to £5,000. This strand of funding is currently closed until further notice.

Under the [Organisations Emergency Programme](#) small and medium sized organisations will be able to apply for maximum funding of £25,000 to help them develop new projects or programmes. The deadlines for funding under this strand is Friday 12 June 2020 at 4 pm.

- [Sports Hardship Fund](#): a £2,000 grant scheme for any organisation delivering sport and physical recreation experiencing short-term financial hardship due to coronavirus. Registration for this scheme closed on Wednesday 20 May 2020. New applications are currently suspended.

Further detail on these NI Executive business support measures is available at [NI Business Info](#), an online service provided by Invest NI.

Business support helplines

HMRC tax helpline

HMRC has set up a [helpline for businesses and self-employed people who are concerned about paying their tax](#) due to COVID-19. The updated helpline number to support customers impacted by coronavirus is 0800 024 1222 and is open from 8am to 4pm Monday to Friday. HMRC have introduced this number to ensure extra capacity on their network so customers can get through to us more quickly. Calls to the old helpline number will be redirected.

Invest NI helpline

Get help with your business online, or by calling the [Invest NI](#) helpline. Telephone: 0800 181 4422

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Last updated 10 June 2020 [+ show all updates](#)

1. 10 June 2020

Updated guidance reflected.

2. 18 May 2020

Updated Government policy

3. 30 April 2020

Updated information.

4. 22 April 2020

Updated information and guidance.

5. 6 April 2020

further updates to the gov.uk link pages

6. 31 March 2020

Further updated weblinks

7. 31 March 2020

Updated website links

8. 27 March 2020

Update with new Self-Employment Income Support Scheme details

9. 21 March 2020

First published.

PM call with the UN Secretary-General: 20 March 2020

The Prime Minister spoke to UN Secretary-General António Guterres this evening to discuss international efforts to combat the coronavirus pandemic.

They agreed on the need for a global response to this global challenge, and for countries to coordinate in order to stop the spread of the virus and limit the economic impact on our citizens.

They underlined the importance of continued funding for the development of a vaccine and to support the resilience of healthcare systems in developing countries.

The Prime Minister said that the UK had already committed £241 million to the international response and would continue to look at what further support was necessary.

Chancellor announces workers' support package

The Chancellor has today outlined an unprecedented package of measures to protect millions of people's jobs and incomes as part of the national effort in response to coronavirus. This comes as Government instructs entertainment

and hospitality premises, like bars and restaurants, to close from tonight to limit spread of coronavirus.

A new Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme will be set up to help pay people's wages. Employers will be able to contact HMRC for a grant to cover most of the wages of their workforce who remain on payroll but are temporarily not working during the coronavirus outbreak. Any employer in the country- small or large, charitable or non-profit will be eligible for the scheme.

Universal Credit and tax credits will also be increased as part of an almost £7 billion welfare boost, as he outlined one of the most generous business and welfare packages by any government so far in response to Covid-19.

To ease cash flow pressures for UK VAT registered businesses, VAT bills from now until the end of June, will be deferred until the end of the tax year.

The Chancellor's workers' support package means:

- UK workers of any employer who is placed on the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme can keep their job, with the government paying up to 80% of a worker's wages, up to a total of £2,500 per worker each month. These will be backdated to 1st March and will be initially open for 3 months, to be extended if necessary.
- VAT payments due between now and the end of June will be deferred. No VAT registered business will have to make a VAT payment normally due with their VAT return to HMRC in that period. Income tax payments due in July 2020 under the Self Assessment system will be deferred to January 2021, benefitting up to 5.7m self-employed businesses.
- Additionally, the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme, launched at Budget, will now be interest free for twelve months.
- The standard rate in Universal credit and Tax Credits will be increased by £20 a week for one year from April 6th, meaning claimants will be up to £1040 better off.
- Nearly £1bn of additional support for renters, through increases in the generosity of housing benefit and Universal Credit. From April, Local Housing Allowance rates will pay for at least 30% of market rents in each area.

HMRC are working night and day to get the unprecedented Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme up and running and we expect the first grants to be paid within weeks.

Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak said:

We continue to do everything possible to protect the public from coronavirus. We have been working round the clock so that we can today confirm an unprecedented package of support to protect people's jobs and wages. And we're strengthening our safety net at the same time.

I said we would help individuals, businesses and the most vulnerable through this outbreak and I meant it. We will do

whatever it takes in the weeks and months ahead.

Work and Pensions Secretary Therese Coffey said:

We will do whatever it takes to protect the most vulnerable and get them through these unprecedented times, and the changes we are making to Universal Credit will help millions of people in most need.

We are standing by those who rely on the welfare safety net as we work towards turning the tide on this disease and moving on together.

Business Secretary, Alok Sharma, said:

We have committed to doing whatever it takes to support businesses and households through these unprecedented times, and today shows just how far we are willing to go.

This intervention is unheard of in peacetime, but it is crucial we stand behind our businesses and those that rely on them for work and income.

All measures announced today across the business and welfare package are UK-wide.

In order to help delay the spread of Coronavirus, the Government has instructed entertainment and hospitality businesses including pubs, bars and restaurants to close from tonight.

This follows expert advice that more needs to be done in order to tackle the spread of infection – following the call to action to isolate or socially distance. The measure, set to be reviewed on a monthly basis, will not affect supermarkets or retailers that supply fuel, medicines and other vital goods, which will continue to be open as normal for the public.

The following businesses have been asked to close:

- Food and drink venues for consumption on-site, such as restaurants and cafes.
- Drinking establishments, including pubs, bars, nightclubs.
- Entertainment venues, including cinemas, theatres, concert halls, and bingo halls.
- Museums and galleries.
- Spas, wellness centres and massage parlours.
- Casinos and betting shops.
- All indoor leisure and sports facilities, including gyms.

This measure will not impact the relaxation of planning rules announced

earlier this week which will allow pubs and restaurants to operate as hot food takeaways during the coronavirus outbreak.

The decision on closures will be reviewed on a monthly basis, and are being implemented across the whole of the UK in agreement with the devolved administrations. If needed, the government will enforce these measures by law.

Communities Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

We will do whatever it takes to protect people across this country as we tackle the coronavirus outbreak.

While people have responded well to calls for social distancing and self-isolation, we must go further if we are to be able to stop the spread of the virus and protect the most vulnerable people in our society, and our NHS.

That is why we are now telling entertainment and hospitality premises to close temporarily, and people to only travel if absolutely essential, to help protect each other from the further spread of the virus.

We stand behind businesses and their employees and are offering an unprecedented range of support as we tackle this huge challenge together.

More information about the measures announced for businesses by the Chancellor can [be found here](#).