

## A guide to understanding COVID-19

At times of such uncertainty we understand first-hand how this situation may be making people feel uncertain of what's next; you may have thoughts around emotional issues like concerns over your loved ones or practical elements around our usual lifestyle which may be affected by these circumstances. With information about Covid-19 being thrown at us from every direction at the moment all the terminology can be a little overwhelming. We hope that you will find the following information gathering and jargon buster useful.

**Care first Information Specialists and Counsellors are available 24/7 via your Freephone number to provide additional support and information** - you can speak to a professional counsellor or information specialist [in confidence](#). We are designed to help you with a wide range of work, family and personal issues as well as the current Covid-19 outbreak anything from work-life balance to childcare information, relationships to workplace issues, health and well-being; we can support you on the issues that affect all of us at some point in our lives.

**The quick links below will take you directly to the information you're looking for:**

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## Definitions

**Coronavirus:** are a large family of different viruses which can cause illness in animals or humans. Each coronavirus is slightly different, but in humans, they all cause issues with your respiratory system, which is what helps you breathe. This can range from something like the common cold to more severe diseases, including SARS and MERS.

**COVID-19:** this is the name of the disease that is caused by the most recently discovered coronavirus. It can affect your lungs and airways. An acronym created by the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) that stands for the respiratory disease caused by the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2). It stands for "coronavirus disease of 2019".

**Asymptomatic:** means the absence of any symptoms of a disease.

This means that you could have an infection but not feel any ill effects or even notice any signs that you are suffering from it. Scientists believe the risk of passing on coronavirus if you're asymptomatic is low because it's mostly passed on through droplets which collect in the air when someone coughs. However, if you sneeze or have a cough, even a mild one, it is possible to pass on the virus.

**Chief Medical Officer:** the Chief Medical Officer is the most senior government advisor on health matters. There are four CMOs in the United Kingdom who are appointed to advise their respective governments:

- Her Majesty's Government (CMO for England and medical adviser to the United Kingdom government), the Northern Ireland Executive, the Scottish Government and the Welsh Government.
- Professor Chris Whitty for England and to the UK government;
- Dr Michael McBride, the CMO to the Northern Ireland executive;
- Dr Catherine Calderwood, the CMO to the Scottish government; and,
- Dr Frank Atherton, the CMO to the Welsh government.

They are responsible for improving the mental and physical well-being of the people who live in the country. They have been giving information and advice to people who work in the NHS, as well as the public, about COVID-19.

**Contact:** There's been some confusion around what exactly counts as 'contact' when we talk about social distancing or isolation. Contact means more than physically touching others. Although the coronavirus doesn't seem to be 'in the air', it can be transmitted through droplets when people cough or sneeze. Avoiding contact means making sure you are always at least two metres away from other people during your daily exercise or when food shopping.

**Contain phase:** The UK Government has four different phases (contain, delay, research and mitigate) of dealing with COVID-19 to make sure the public are as safe as possible. The first phase we were in was the contain phase. The contain phase was about finding the first cases of COVID-19 in the country and making sure the people they were in close contact with were okay. It was about trying to make sure as few people caught it as possible. We have now moved into the delay phase.

**Delay phase:** The delay phase is the second phase and is about slowing down the spread of the virus and making sure that the NHS doesn't have too many patients at the same time - especially during the already busy winter period when lots of people tend to become unwell.

**You should only leave the house for 1 of 4 reasons:**

- shopping for basic necessities, for example food and medicine, which must be as infrequent as possible
- one form of exercise a day, for example a run, walk, or cycle – alone or with members of your household
- any medical need, or to provide care or to help a vulnerable person

- travelling to and from work, but only where this absolutely cannot be done from home.

## Important

These 4 reasons are exceptions – even when doing these activities, you should be minimising time spent outside of the home and ensuring you are 2 metres apart from anyone outside of your household.

Information:

There is separate advice about:

- [staying at home if you're at high risk of getting seriously ill from coronavirus](#)
- [staying at home if you or someone you live with has symptoms of coronavirus](#)

**Essential/key workers:** 'Essential' or 'key' workers include police, health and social staff, and people who work in shops selling food and other important products. A full list of jobs which are considered essential is available from the Government website.

With schools closing, the Government has advised that children and young people should stay home wherever possible to lower the spread of the coronavirus. Schools will remain open only for those that absolutely can't stay at home. This includes children of 'essential' or 'key' workers, these are parents or carers that have a critical part to play in the COVID-19 response.

**Flatten the curve:** You might have seen or heard this phrase quite a lot. It's about making sure that there isn't a big increase in people catching COVID-19 all at the same time to make sure that there are enough hospital beds, and medical staff, to look after everyone. By flattening the curve - making sure that there are fewer people all infected at the same time - the NHS will be less stressed, there will be fewer hospital visits on any given day and doctors and nurses will have more time to treat more people. This is achieved by things like social distancing, which makes sure that people stay away from each other to reduce the risk of spreading the virus.

**Furlough:** If your job is affected by COVID-19 and, as a result, your employer can't cover your wages, they can apply for a Government grant for 80% (up to a cap of £2,500 a month) of your pay through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. This would mean that you become 'furloughed'.

While you are furloughed, you stay on your employer's payroll but don't work for the duration. Your employer can choose to pay you the remaining 20% of your wage but doesn't have to. The Government intends for the scheme to last for three months from 1st March 2020, but will extend if necessary. More information is available on the gov.uk website.

**High temperature/fever:** Your normal body temperature is approximately 37C (98.6F). A fever is usually when your body temperature is 38C (100.4F) or more. You may feel warm, cold or shivery. You can find out if you have a fever by using a thermometer to take your temperature.

**How to stop infection spreading:** There are things you can do to help reduce the risk of you and anyone you live with getting ill with coronavirus.

#### DO:

- wash your hands with soap and water often – do this for at least 20 seconds
- use hand sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available
- wash your hands as soon as you get back home
- cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when you cough or sneeze
- put used tissues in the bin immediately and wash your hands afterwards

#### DON'T:

- do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean

**Immunocompromised:** People who have weakened or impaired immunity due to a chronic health condition, medication or malnutrition.

**Incubation:** The incubation period is the time it takes for symptoms to appear after a person is infected. According to the WHO, most estimates of the incubation period for COVID-19 range from 1-14 days, most commonly around five days.

**Lockdown:** Lockdown is not a technical term used by officials but is often the word used to describe when a government tells people to stay at home and restricts movement that is not urgent.

For example, when the city of Wuhan in China and later the whole of Italy were described as going into 'lockdown' both countries stopped public transport, closed schools and told people to stay indoors unless they needed to get essential food or medical supplies.

The announcement made by the Prime Minister on 23rd March is being described as a lockdown as additional restrictions have been put on how people go about their day-to-day lives.

**Pandemic:** An epidemic that has spread over several countries/continents, usually affecting a large number of people.

**PPE:** Personal Protective Equipment, it includes, but is not limited to, medically approved gowns, aprons or coveralls, gloves, respirators, face shields and masks.

**Pregnancy advice:** If you're pregnant and worried about coronavirus, you can get [advice about coronavirus and pregnancy from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists](#).

**Quarantine:** involves people staying at home or another location to make sure that disease isn't spread. You don't need to have symptoms of the disease to be quarantined, it may be that you have travelled from a country that has a lot of cases of COVID-19 and they need to make sure you aren't carrying it.

**Self-isolation:** is when someone stays away from other people to make sure they don't spread infections to others. This normally means staying at home and not going outside or having visitors to your house. If you live with other people, the NHS advises to try and stay at least two meters (about three steps) away from other people in your home.

People who are self-isolating are asked to avoid public transport, to not share items like towels and toothbrushes with other people and to ask for neighbours, friends and family to support with essential food shopping and/or collecting medicine that can be left at your door.

The UK Government are advising if you have a high temperature (explained above) or a new cough that you 'self-isolate' and stay at home for seven days. Read the Government advice on what to do if you need to self-isolate.

**Social-distancing :** this involves staying further away from people to make sure that people don't become unwell. The UK Government has given its definition of social distancing to include:

- avoiding contact with people who are displaying symptoms of COVID-19 which include high temperature and/or new and continuous cough;
- avoiding non-essential use of public transport, trying your best to avoid rush hour if you can
- working from home if this is an option for your job;
- avoiding large gatherings such as concerts and in smaller public spaces such as pubs, cinemas, restaurants, theatres, bars, clubs (all non-essential shops have been asked to close as of the evening of 23rd March);
- avoiding gatherings with friends and family (as of the evening of 23rd March, gatherings of more than two people outside of the home are banned - excluding people you live with). Instead, use your phone or social media to keep in touch;
- calling or going online to contact your GP or other essential services.

**Underlying condition:** A long-term health issue, including asthma, diabetes, HIV, chronic lung disease, cancer and more.

**What to do if you need medical help:** If you need medical help for any reason, do not go to places like a GP surgery, pharmacy or hospital.

If you have symptoms of coronavirus (a high temperature or a new, continuous cough), use the [111 coronavirus service](#).

If you need help or advice not related to coronavirus:

- for health information and advice, use the [NHS website](#) or your GP surgery website
- for urgent medical help, use the [NHS 111 online service](#) – only call 111 if you're unable to get help online
- for life-threatening emergencies, call 999 for an ambulance.

Read more advice about [getting medical help at home](#).

**World Health Organisation (WHO):** The World Health Organisation is made up of lots of different health experts across 194 member states and 150 offices. They work together to make sure that people across the globe are safe from disease as well as poor mental and physical health. They also work together with countries to help them manage any health problems or emergencies they are facing. In terms of COVID-19, they've done research into how it's spread, given advice on how to test for the virus, and helped countries respond by providing advice and information.

#### Useful Links:

- [Care first](#)
- [HEE Connect coronavirus advice and guidance](#)
- [NHS website coronavirus information](#)
- [Public Health England: Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance for health professionals and other organisations](#)
- [Public Health England coronavirus dashboard](#)
- [PHE: Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): What is self-isolation and why is it important?](#)
- [HCPC – COVID-19: Information for education providers](#)
- [HCPC – COVID-19: Regulation – joint statement with other regulators](#)
- [Corona Virus Resource from Wiley – Relevant research on COVID-19](#)
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) – advice for higher education providers](#)

(Sources: NHS, young.scot, gov.uk, national school of healthcare science)