



WHITE PAPER

Coronavirus outbreak update

Information sheet 4 - as of 6th March 2020



Coronavirus outbreak (as of 6th March 2020) update

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Advice around the COVID-19 outbreak is being produced, revised and updated by a number of agencies and organisations, it is also high on the news agenda. With employees and others, as well as employers, now being exposed to a wealth of - not always consistent - messages, information and communication is key.

Below is an update with links to the latest published advice (as of 6th March 2020) covering general information as well as a number of repeat questions we are getting.

Background

Coronaviruses (CoV) are a family of microorganisms that can cause illnesses in people which ranges from colds to more severe diseases such as SARS - Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (caused by SARS-CoV) and MERS - Middle East Respiratory Syndrome caused by (MERS-CoV).

Strains of the disease not previously seen in humans are termed novel coronaviruses (NCoV) and the current outbreak is being caused by one of these novel viruses called severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) with the disease named COVID-19.

Illness usually results from close contact with an already infected person – coronaviruses are typically transmitted through respiratory droplets/contact with infected secretions and other body fluids. Due to the fact the COVID-19 remains a new disease our knowledge continues to develop.

New (novel) coronavirus diseases occur as a result of a virus “jumping” from one animal species to another, causing infection that is then able to be passed on to other members of that new species.

Current outbreak

As of yesterday (5th March 2020) the World Health Organisation (WHO) were reporting global cases of COVID-19 to have reached 95,333, causing the deaths of 3,282 people. The WHO risk assessment for the outbreak globally is “very high”.

Over recent days new countries reporting their first cases of COVID-19 include, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Slovenia, Argentina, Chile, Poland and Ukraine. Of the 86 countries so far reporting confirmed cases of the disease, the majority (46) are “Imported cases only” – where the infection has been caught outside the country of reporting - the remainder being through “Local transmission” - the source of infection is within the country of reporting - or “under investigation”.

The risk in the UK remains at “moderate” and with over 18,083 people tested for COVID-19 only 115 have been confirmed as positive (as of 5th March 2020). The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) identify no coronavirus associated restrictions for travel to most countries, excepting China (and Hubei Province specifically) as well as specified areas of both South Korea and Italy. Advice is provided by GOV.UK and FCO for travellers returning from 18 specified countries or areas.

COVID-19 updated guidance/frequently asked questions

1. What is the UK strategy for managing COVID-19

The Government has established a four phase response to handling COVID-19, “contain, delay, research, mitigate” which covers:

- **Contain** - the aim is to prevent/reduce the spread of the virus across the country by testing, detecting and isolating early cases (travel related or community) and tracing people who have been in contact with those shown to be infected.
- **Delay** – By slowing the rate at which COVID-19 spreads, it is hoped the percentage of the population infected at any one time can be managed in terms of its impact on our health and other services and businesses, etc. The summer months tend to see a decrease in colds and flu, so if the peak of the disease can be delayed, it should help in managing the knock on effects.
- **Research** – This phase is already in place with centres around the world looking at further developing diagnostic tests, care plans and through global alliances such as the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) fund research into vaccines – The UK Government is already been funding some of this work.
- **Mitigate** – Depending on the extent of the spread of COVID-19 in the UK, this phase will involve plans to minimise the impact of the disease on society, our public services and economy, as well as supporting hospitals and other essential services to provide the best levels of care possible.

On the 3rd March 2020 the UK Government and Devolved Administrations also published “Coronavirus: action plan. A guide to what you can expect across the UK”. The link to this document can be found below:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/869827/Coronavirus_action_plan_-_a_guide_to_what_you_can_expect_across_the_UK.pdf

2. Should we be upgrading the filters in our air handling units to combat COVID-19?

Viruses are very small, being, in general, between 10 and 100 times smaller than bacteria. Filters in typical office air handling units are not designed to or able to provide effective filtration against such small particles

Based on our current understanding COVID-19 is a zoonotic (initially came from animals) disease, where person to person transmission is now through either:

- Close personal contact with and infected person or droplets formed (when coughing and sneezing) in close contact with other people. These droplets can then be inhaled.
- An infected person touching a surface and contaminating it with droplets or mucus containing the virus, someone else touching a surface and then touching the mucus membranes on their face (around the eyes, nose and mouth).

It is highly unlikely, even if it were possible to upgrade your air handling systems with very high efficiency filters (and assuming that your fans could cope with such filters), that this action will have any appreciable effect on reducing the potential person to person spread of COVID-19.

Maintaining good personal and hand hygiene and following government advice where cases are identified/suspected would be far more beneficial. If you did want to consider options with your air handling systems, reducing the quantity of recirculated air and increasing the intake of filtered outside air (if possible in your set up) would help dilute any internally generated pollutants, but could lead to increased energy usage (in terms of heating the extra intake air).

3. What is the advice on cleaning in view of the current coronavirus outbreak?

GOV.UK has produced guidance on a range of issues relating how we can help manage the current coronavirus outbreak, this includes cleaning/decontamination of non-healthcare settings and covers workplaces, schools and boarding accommodation. The link is

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings>

EU advice relating to cleaning can be found at:

<https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/coronavirus-SARS-CoV-2-guidance-environmental-cleaning-non-healthcare-facilities.pdf>

It should be remembered though that, like hand washing (and a happy birthday – other songs are available - to anyone who has a birthday today!), cleaning is only as good as how well it is performed and frequency alone may not therefore relate to effectiveness.



4. Where can I get more advice from on coronavirus?

There are a whole host of organisations producing information and guidance around coronaviruses, actions and advice on this outbreak – including us.

What you have to remember though is the situation is dynamic and not all the advice produced may be relevant to you and your organisation or the risks affecting it. Points to consider when seeking or using any advice/information:

- Take a pragmatic view and assess what you need to do on risk, not sentiment, and certainly there is no need for alarm or knee jerk reactions. The UK Government assessment of risk is moderate for a reason.
- Look for sources of trusted, reliable advice. There is a significant amount of information out there and not all of it may be accurate or relevant.
- Information and advice is changing, so keep an eye on it. For example WHO and GOV.UK are providing updates pretty much daily.
- With the above in mind, keep your business continuity planning up to date.

5. Miscellaneous questions...answered

We have had a range of questions posed to us around COVID-19 including:

- The merits of using paper towels and warm air dryers?
- Are there any specific treatments we can use for the coronavirus?
- Who is at most risk from a coronavirus infection?

These along with a number of other questions and growing "myths" have been tackled by the WHO through the link below:

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/myth-busters>



6. Coronavirus is now a reportable disease in the UK

As of yesterday COVID-19 has been added to the list of notifiable diseases under the Health Protection (Notification) Regulations 2010, with SARS-COV-2 also added to the list of notifiable causative agents.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/coronavirus-covid-19-listed-as-a-notifiable-disease>

The action to be taken should a case or suspected case be remains the same and the NHS site (link below) provides some good background information.

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

For information on the services Assurity Consulting provide, please get in touch.



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