



Understanding ModernGov

Covid-19: Employer Response Guide

A 'How To' Guide for you and your organisation under a global health emergency

Covid-19:

COVID-19 is a new illness that can affect your lungs and airways. It's caused by a virus called coronavirus.

Some of the most affected countries: China, Italy, Spain + 180 countries.

What is a Pandemic:

The World Health Organisation declared a pandemic on 11th March 2020.

A pandemic is defined as *the global outbreak of a disease*

Covid-19 used to be considered an Epidemic: *a sudden increase in the number of cases of a disease*

HR:

Ask all employees their emergency contacts and details: either added or updated. Understanding ModernGov uses [BreatheHR](#).

- Each employee has their own profile and can navigate easily

Ensure your employees know the difference between working from home and self-isolating.

Continue to monitor and communicate changes, made by the Government and/or within the organisation.

Ensure the management team are clear about policies regarding sick leave, sick pay, home working; particularly if someone is diagnosed with the virus.

Review your policy around absence and where possible contractual sick pay

Send employees the NHS list of countries / areas where it may be necessary to get medical advice [here](#)

What are the first steps?

Since a pandemic can escalate quickly, your employees' health and safety are an absolute priority. The latest Government advice is to avoid public places. Employees should be working at home and UK schools closed on Friday 20th March 2020 until further notice, announced by the Education Secretary. Organisations need to focus on planning and prevention urgently and calmly. Not all organisations are prepared to work remotely or understand the precautions that are necessary. These steps should be taken for all employees where possible and to best accommodate them.

Organisations need to think about a contingency plan during a pandemic. As an example, we would like to share some of the ways that Understanding ModernGov are dealing with the crisis. We made the difficult decision to postpone scheduled March, April, May and June courses to July, August and September because the health and wellbeing of our delegates, trainers and staff is at the forefront of our concern. Our sales team is working hard to contact booked delegates to offer them the new dates. It was important for the Managing Director to send a tailored email to stakeholders to explain the changes and solutions.

Understanding ModernGov was introduced to [Microsoft Teams](#). You have easy access to conference calls and chats rather than emailing or dialling on your phone. You can also share documents which will automatically save if changes are made. More than one colleague can edit the documents at the same time. Firstly, download the app and use your work details to login. Afterwards, create a Team (i.e. Organisation name, Marketing, Sales etc). Once created and set up, find the 'Files' tab under the team you created. Transfer files onto the team by dragging them from a shared folder or another location where you save your documents normally. If you want to create a file and just share on a chat, this is available as well. This is very beneficial for working remotely: easy communication and access to files and calls.

Your organisation should have a pandemic coordinator or Head of People (HR equivalent) who monitors what is happening outside and within the organisation and give constructive advice. Directors should also keep in touch with their employees regularly and appoint a meeting, possibly once a week with the whole team. If your organisation consists of different divisions and departments, the Head of Division should organise this weekly meeting/conference call. Understanding ModernGov's COO decided to connect all employees every Monday to ensure they are doing well (personally, and professionally) and to update/make special announcements. This should be a regular policy within every organisation during a global emergency.

In addition to postponing our events another contingency plan could be webinars, 1-2hour sessions, Zoom or Skype. Schools and universities introduced virtual lessons for their students so they can continue to study as normal. Teachers and professors can offer online instruction in order to avoid implications.

Commercial and Digital is thriving during this pandemic. Digital subscription services are increasing in sales while stores, fashion chains and restaurants are being significantly affected. Although there is an outbreak, retailers were already suffering from the shift to online shopping. Barclaycard declared more than a quarter of shoppers said they are avoiding high streets and busy places in fear of contracting the virus.

Keep in mind your organisation's original service, however. Digital is a substitute (supplement) not a replacement to coach and communicate further.

How do you protect your employees?

Clear communication. This is probably the most critical part. Remote working entails all communication is more key because everything will be written i.e. online. Stay informed by visiting [Information for the Public](#) and the [National Health Service](#) (NHS). Circulate to all employees and remind them of the symptoms. If employees live with other people, ensure how to act around them such as avoid non-essential contact, use masks, gloves and hand sanitiser. Remember to also wash your hands for 20 seconds more frequently. This will improve the risk of spreading the virus especially in communal areas. Please clean kitchens, bathrooms as regularly as possible. IMPORTANT, there is no vaccination available currently.

For vulnerable employees, social distancing measures is advised to reduce transmission. If an employer is at a higher risk of Covid-19, remain diligent. This includes:

- aged 70 or older (regardless of any medical conditions)
- under 70 with underlying health conditions, such as
 - chronic respiratory diseases (i.e. asthma)
 - chronic heart disease
 - weakened immune system
- Pregnant women

Social Distancing?

For NHS workers, starting 23rd March 2020 it is mandatory to wear masks and gloves.

- Avoid contact with someone who has the symptoms
- Avoid non-essential use of travel (including public transport): 40 London tube stations to be closed (announced by TFL on 19th March 2020). Only critical workers will be able to commute. For the full list of tube closures, visit [here](#)
- Avoid large gatherings such as pubs, cinemas, restaurants, theatres: West End has closed all its theatres until further notice
- Avoid gatherings also with family and friends: try to use all communication means such as social media, Skype (or Skype for Business)
- Only call your medical surgery / GP
 - Patients are advised to call to explain their symptoms
 - The GP has a call log and will call back asking what the patient has
 - If crucial, the GP will ask the patient to come into the surgery
 - If not crucial, the GP might offer a prescription via phone and the patient can pick it up at their local pharmacy
 - Several GPs have also introduced video calling

If an employee needs to self-isolate, recommended by the NHS 111 or a GP (doctor) or are being sent home as a precaution, the UK Government announced new measures that mean these employees are entitled to Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) from day one. This also includes Covid-19 carriers but might not necessarily have the symptoms. Those who have the symptoms, are told to self-isolate for a minimum of 7 days. If an employee lives with someone who has the symptoms, you'll need to self-isolate for 14 days.

Symptoms include: Fever, cough and shortness of breath. These may appear 2-14 days after exposure. Seek medical advice immediately by dialling if you experience any of these symptoms. Organisations should send reminders to their employees encouraging them not to visit medical surgeries but call 111.

Keep yourself updated with World News (in addition to the UK). The BBC is a perfect platform (including Live) with specific and precise information regarding the virus. If you have any concerns, please continue to visit the NHS site or contact your managers as soon as possible.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Health Secretary are introducing tougher measures to reduce transmission:

- Stay two metres apart

- Keep children at home
- Closing all retail stores
- Fines on people who ignore the advice

Remote Working

United States President Donald Trump will host the G7 Summit via teleconference, said by The Financial Times on 19th March 2020.

Encourage remote working and how it is efficient; now more than ever.

- Planning
- Good communications
- People management

Shifting to the 'home office' has become the norm in many countries and it can last for several weeks. If you are working remotely for the first time, meet with your manager beforehand and ask questions: how to keep up with tasks, communicate, deliver results and maintain good mental health.

- Prepare your mindset to Work from Home (or WFH). Although you are at home, you are still working normal hours.
- Designate a space for work and make sure it is comfortable
- Structure your day
- Take Accountability: Communicate any problems with either your manager or team. If you cannot finish a project remotely, please be transparent with your team and brainstorm whether an alternative can be found.

We now live in a digital age where everything is easily accessible and communicated. The most important part of remote working is clear communication. Organisations should advise which platforms are best to create conference calls, meetings. Understanding ModernGov still suggests [Microsoft Teams](#).

If all employees have work laptops, the IT team should test and supervise before the last day in the office.

If you forget your work laptop, keyboard and mouse at work. Ask your CTO (if possible) or Head of IT to have a collection point (or Drop-in Session). This should be scheduled ideally before or at the beginning of remote working. The CTO should confirm a date and time (slot) at your offices. If employees cannot go at the given time, contact the CTO the day before to ask if a courier is possible.

Set up a good workspace at home and ensure you are comfortable.

The Government officially declared the Covid-19 a high risk on Wednesday 18th March 2020. Review the following with your organisation:

- Sick leave and pay
- Annual leave and pay

Annual Leave

Mandatory; Your HR team might send an email asking employees to take several days (or full annual leave allocation) off.

- This is to restore your organisation's workforce balance for the second half of the year.

Review your annual leave policy and have clear communication about what happens if employees cancel their holiday due to travel restrictions.

Advise against travelling to high affected countries (i.e. China, Italy, Spain, Iran, South Korea) and avoid any race prejudice.

- If you were due to travel in March and April: All flights to (and from) Italy are cancelled until 3rd April
 - However, Italy are due to extend their lockdown period but if you were due to travel after 3rd April, British Airways are advising passengers to cancel their booking and apply for a voucher. This policy is valid until 31st May 2020.
 - If you are travelling with another airline, check their policies and recommendations
- If you are/were due to travel to other countries, check and advise with your organisation and airline.

Families

On Wednesday 18th March 2020, the Education Secretary announced all schools will close in Scotland, England, Northern Ireland and Wales.

This academic year's exams will not go ahead in England and Wales. To be confirmed for Scotland and Northern Ireland. This will be for all children except for those of key workers and children who are most vulnerable. This is due to help slow the spread of the virus. Each parent can take up to 18 weeks for each child in weeks at a time with a maximum of 4 weeks a year for each child.

Parental leave may also be an option.

Do not ask grandparents to help with childcare due to their vulnerability and high risk to the virus.

Schools have been drawing up homework packs and online resources to help parents at home educate.

The Government also plans to provide a skeletal school service for parents who are key workers: including doctors, nurses and food delivery workers.

Vulnerable children who are need of a social worker and support, will be able to attend school.

Children are not severely affected by the virus. The main age group is the elderly.

Single parents who are also key workers will be entitled to a school place.

All GCSE and A-levels have been cancelled.

For parents, Twinkl in particular (www.twinkl.co.uk) which is normally a slightly pricey subscription is now running a free 2 week promo owing to coronavirus and you can download lots of resources.

Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, also announced that renters will be protected by eviction by bringing an emergency legislation.

At Home

How can I adapt to my daily routine?

- Talk to neighbours and family to exchange phone numbers
- Consider who is the most vulnerable in the household
- Create a contact list with phone numbers of neighbours, schools, employer, chemist, NHS 111
- Set up online shopping accounts (if not already)

Since Covid-19 is impacting the UK further and further, staying at home is now very important. As a family you can:

- Plan and schedule what you will need to buy / order for the next 7-14 days
- Talk to your organisation, family and friends to ask their help to access anything you may need
- Plan how to get access to food and other supplies such as medicines
- Ask family or friends to drop off anything you need or order supplies online
 - The supplies need to be dropped off outside your home for collection
- Keep in touch with family and friends
- Think about what you can do while at home; keep yourselves busy
- Make-shift calendar
- Physical exercise (good for your wellbeing too): check courses online

If you need more information, visit [here](#)

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Please be considerate during a pandemic. Employees might be very worried about catching the virus, while others might be concerned about their families and friends, especially in very affected areas. Listen to their concerns and reassure your support and measures are being taken to protect everyone and there is no need to panic. If you are troubled, speak and listen to your manager who will offer support and guidance to reassure you.

If you are anxious or experiencing more anxiety, ask advice to your organisation who might offer assistant programmes, counselling or other well-being resources.

Keep checking in on employee's workload and stress level and offer support where possible. If you have targets, adjust them accordingly for employees who remain working and are flexible with deadlines.

If there are employees who cannot or are unable to work, it will result in other employees working longer hours. Please comply with the [Working Time Regulations 1998](#).

Follow the World Health Organisation's recommendations:

- Avoid watching, reading or listening to news that could cause you to feel anxious or distress
- Seek information mainly to take practical steps to prepare your plans and protect yourself and loved ones
- Seek information updates at specific times

Allocate a buddy during the weeks of working from home: work catch up or someone to speak to (if confidential, speak to your manager).

No one could've predicted the current pandemic, and it can have a big effect on our mental health and wellbeing.

If the news and social media are triggering, have breaks. Check the news once a day, ideally towards the end of the afternoon or just after lunch. This could help your focus throughout the day and avoid causing any anxiety.

Maintain a good mental health and wellbeing by:

- Find the right place to stay
- Try new exercise routines, relaxation techniques or finding new knowledge online.
- Eat well and stay hydrated
- Get as much sunlight / air as possible but avoid big public spaces such as parks
- Stay connected, especially during times of stress.
- Try not to over analyse what is published on online (particularly social media).
- When reading or sharing content, use trusted sources.
- Involving family and children is good health as well.
- Minimise the negative impact and discuss the news with children using a different tone.
- Do not have too much exposure of the virus coverage.
- Find a balance between not informed and too informed about the virus.
- Support one another! We are all in this together.

Make a constructive checklist:

- Food: do you have enough, and can it be delivered?

- Cleaning: supplies stocked up?
- Money: budget for higher expenses or save money on transport
- Work: remote working (if possible). What are your rights of payment and benefits?
- Medication: do you have enough?
- Health: reschedule planned therapy and/or treatments
- Commitments: can anyone help?
- Connectivity: check contact details regularly
- Routine: create a timetable for yourself
- Relax: doing something creative

Understanding ModernGov thanks all medical staff and scientists who are helping our communities.

We will continuously support you.

Stay safe.