

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Elected Member Briefing 3rd March 2020

The coronavirus outbreak is a rapidly evolving situation. On Thursday 30 January the World Health Organisation declared this as a global health emergency and in response, the four UK Chief Medical Officers raised the risk to the public from low to moderate.

This briefing note is intended to support Elected Members in their efforts to help manage the spread and impact of the coronavirus in Blackburn with Darwen.

1. Information about the virus:

A coronavirus is a type of virus. As a group, coronaviruses are common across the world. Typical symptoms of coronavirus include fever and a cough that may progress to a severe pneumonia causing shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. Novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is a new strain of coronavirus first identified in Wuhan City, China

Generally, coronavirus can cause more severe symptoms in people with weakened immune systems, older people, and those with long-term conditions like diabetes, cancer and chronic lung disease.

Given that there is currently neither a vaccine against COVID-19 nor any specific, proven, antiviral medication, most treatment will comprise managing symptoms and providing support to patients with complications.

The majority of people with COVID-19 have recovered without the need for any specific treatment and the vast majority of cases will best be managed at home, as is the case for the common cold or seasonal flu.

2. Government action:

The UK is well prepared for disease outbreaks, having responded to a wide range of infectious disease outbreaks in the recent past, and having undertaken significant preparedness work for an influenza pandemic for well over one decade. Plans are regularly tested and updated locally and nationally to ensure they are fit for purpose. This experience provides the basis for an effective response to COVID-19.

Planning draws on the idea of a “reasonable worst case (RWC)” scenario. This is not a forecast of what is most likely to happen, but will ensure we are ready to respond to a range of scenarios.

[The Health Protection \(Coronavirus\) Regulations 2020](#) have been put in place to reduce the risk of further human-to-human transmission in this country by keeping individuals in isolation where public health professionals believe there is a reasonable risk an individual may have the virus.

On 10 February, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Matt Hancock, announced [strengthened legal powers to protect public health](#).

On 3rd March the government published its [coronavirus action plan](#) setting out;

- What we know about the virus and the disease it causes
- How the government has planned for an infectious disease outbreak, such as this
- The actions taken so far in response to the current coronavirus outbreak
- Next steps, depending upon the course the current coronavirus outbreak takes
- The role the public can play in supporting this response, now and in the future

The fundamental objectives are to deploy phased actions to **Contain, Delay, and Mitigate** the outbreak, using **Research** to inform policy development, as described below. The different phases, type and scale of actions depends upon how the outbreak unfolds over time.

- **Contain:** detect early cases, follow up close contacts, and prevent the disease taking hold in this country for as long as is reasonably possible
- **Delay:** slow the spread in this country, if it does take hold, lowering the peak impact and pushing it away from the winter season
- **Mitigate:** provide the best care possible for people who become ill, support hospitals to maintain essential services and ensure ongoing support for people ill in the community to minimise the overall impact of the disease on society, public services and on the economy.
- **Research – cross cutting:** to better understand the virus and actions that will lessen its effect; innovate responses including diagnostics, drugs and vaccines; and inform models of care

3. Local response arrangements:

Local response arrangements will vary depending on the phase of the disease response. During the **Containment** Phase Public Health England (PHE) will be the key partner responsible for many of the response arrangements including the following;

- The local Health Protection Team will notify the Director of Public Health of any confirmed case of COVID-19 in Blackburn with Darwen.
- PHE will be responsible for carrying out contact tracing and taking any appropriate public health action required following a confirmed case.
- If deemed necessary, PHE may convene an incident management team meeting of key stakeholders including the DPH following the Multi-agency Outbreak Management Plan
- The Council will be key in ensuring effective communication with the public

The Lancashire Resilience Forum (LRF) has convened a multi-agency Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG). This met on 3rd March and will hold weekly meetings every Tuesday. All category 1 responders under the Civil Contingencies Act such as police, local authorities, PHE and the NHS participate in these meetings. A Tactical Coordinating Group (TCG) for Lancashire is also being set up. The SCG is also establishing a communications cell and business continuity cell.

The NHS has also stepped up its response arrangements. On 3rd March the NHS has declared COVID-19 a level 4 incident. The Council is working with the Pennine CCGs and East Lancashire Hospitals Trust to ensure joined up planning and response arrangements.

Plans for the Councils annual corporate emergency planning/business continuity exercise, already scheduled for 26th March, are being updated to further support and develop our local response.

4. The role the public can play in supporting the response:

An effective response to COVID-19 requires the active participation of all partners, including a well-informed public. Everyone can help support our response by:

- Maintaining good hand, respiratory and personal hygiene
 - Wash hands often with soap and water following [NHS guidelines on good hand hygiene](#)
 - Use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands
 - Avoid close contact with people who are sick
 - If you feel unwell, stay at home, do not attend work or school
 - Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue, throw the tissue in a bin. See [Catch it, Bin it, Kill it](#)



- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces at home and work
- Reducing the impact and spread of misinformation by sharing and using information from trusted sources, such as those set out in Appendix 1 of this document
- Checking and following the latest Foreign and Commonwealth travel advice when travelling and planning to travel
- Ensuring that vaccinations are up to date as this will help reduce the pressure on the NHS through reducing vaccine-preventable diseases
- Checking on elderly or vulnerable family, friends and neighbours
- If you are worried about your symptoms, please call NHS 111. **Do not go directly to your GP or other healthcare environment**
- Being understanding of the pressures the health and social care systems may be under, and receptive to changes that may be needed to the provision of care
- Accepting that the current advice for managing COVID-19 for most people will be self-isolation at home and simple over the counter medicines
- Checking for new advice as the situation changes.

Dominic Harrison
Director of Public Health and Wellbeing
3rd March 2020

APPENDIX 1: USEFUL SOURCES OF INFORMATION (COVID-19)

The links below are reviewed and updated regularly by expert guidance cells. They are therefore, the most of effective way of staying up to date with the latest information and reducing the spread and impact of misinformation.

Enquiry Type	Hyperlink
Coronavirus - what you need to know	<p>Nationally, Public Health England are leading on the health response. They are updating their website daily with the latest information, please go to Wuhan coronavirus information for the public. This is your first point of contact for the latest information and any developments in the UK</p> <p>The NHS Website has more information about coronavirus and how to reduce the possible spread of infection.</p> <p>If you or any member of the public are concerned that you are unwell or unsure about your symptoms, the NHS advice line is 111</p>
Guidance for social or community care and residential settings	This guidance aims to assist social, community and residential care employers in providing advice to their staff.
Guidance for educational settings	This guidance, developed with the Department for Education, aims to assist schools and other educational settings in providing advice to pupils, students, staff and parents or carers
Guidance for employers and businesses	This guidance, developed with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, aims to assist employers and businesses in providing advice to their staff .
Guidance for health professionals	Guidance for health professionals on the assessment and management of suspected UK cases
Guidance for staff in the transport sector	Guidance on general precautions for staff in the transport sector on the assessment and management of arrivals into the UK.
PHE blog: what is contact tracing?	One of the ways in which PHE seek to protect the public from infectious diseases like novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is contact tracing. In this blog Nick Phin, Deputy Director at PHE's National Infections Service, answers some questions about what is contract tracing
PHE blog: what is self-isolation and why is it important?	PHE explains what self-isolation is , why it is important, and which groups are currently being advised to self-isolate.
PHE Campaign Resource Centre: novel coronavirus	PHE has launched a UK-wide public information campaign to advise on how to slow the spread of coronavirus and reduce the impact on NHS services. The Campaign Resource Centre holds materials which can be distributed to communities