

Industry and Government Joint Statement on Telecommunications Support for the NHS

Following productive discussions with the Government, NHS and the UK's major telecoms companies have today agreed a set of new commitments to support the NHS.

The NHS needs broadband and mobile services more than ever with many healthcare services (e.g. hospital outpatient appointments) now being provided remotely. Telecoms companies and their workers are making a major contribution to keeping the nation connected during the COVID-19 emergency, ensuring that people can stay and work from home. They have now stepped up further during this national emergency to support the NHS, its staff and patients.

The UK's major internet and mobile companies, namely BT/EE, Openreach, Sky, talktalk, Virgin Media, O2, Three, Vodafone, Cityfibre, Gigaclear, Tesco Mobile, giffgaff, Hyperoptic and KCOM, have agreed to work with NHS England and NHS Improvement, and NHSX to:

- Offer identified NHS frontline staff, who are existing customers, the mobile data access, voice calls and text they need, at no extra cost, on their personal mobiles used for work purposes, to enable the staff to work remotely without fear of extra charges and limitations;
- Ensure NHS clinicians working from home have, wherever possible, prioritised broadband upgrades to superfast or other improvements they might need, in order to perform tasks, such as consultations carried out via video conferencing and to download/upload large medical files. Clinicians with slow or standard broadband speeds, for example, would be eligible to be upgraded to superfast speeds where their current connections are insufficient. Some providers will upgrade customers who are NHS workers on to faster speeds without any extra charge;
- Improve connectivity in care homes that have slow, or no, broadband connections, wherever possible; and
- While patients having remote consultations will get the best experience on a fixed broadband connection, there are a small proportion of mobile-only households. Operators have already agreed generous data allowances for their vulnerable mobile customers, so that patients that can only use a mobile connection for their video consultations will have sufficient data available.

These commitments are in addition to the support the telecoms companies are providing to the NHS and its patients, including ensuring that the new emergency hospitals being built across the country have the connectivity they need, as well as providing zero-rated access to nhs.uk on mobile connections.

NHS staff will be provided with further information by the NHS on how to

identify to telecommunications providers that they are eligible for this support.

Digital Secretary Oliver Dowden said:

Our NHS heroes need to be able to carry out their vital work without worrying about technology failing them – and people using NHS services online need to be able to rely on their connections.

These welcome commitments will mean frontline NHS staff can use personal phones for work purposes without limits or extra charges, allow GPs to carry out consultations and transfer large files from home, and help vulnerable people who depend most on the NHS for care.

I applaud the NHS for its continued fight to save lives, and mobile and broadband companies who have stepped up yet again to help in the national effort.

NHSX chief executive Matthew Gould said:

Covid-19 has made stark the importance of technology in helping people and those who care for them stay connected.

Technology has the potential to be a tremendous force for good in helping the country and its citizens through the crisis, and we are grateful to industry colleagues for offering their support to the NHS.

Lutz Schüler, CEO of Virgin Media, said:

Everyone at Virgin Media is proud of the work we're doing to help the country stay connected at this difficult time. We're committed to supporting NHS staff whose critical work is keeping us safe. Whether our teams are enhancing services for hospitals and GP surgeries, providing connectivity to care homes or supporting healthcare staff to work remotely, we are working to support the incredible people saving lives every day.

Mark Evans, CEO of O2 said:

I'm proud to see the industry work together to recognise and support the invaluable work of front line NHS staff at this critical time. Connectivity remains more important than ever and we are committed to helping ensure that all our customers can stay in contact with friends, family and colleagues".

Nick Jeffery, CEO of Vodafone UK, said:

We have increased the capacity and reach of our network at the newly established Nightingale hospitals and at many doctors' surgeries up and down the country to ensure we keep patients and NHS staff connected during these challenging times. We're not stopping there. In addition to offering NHS workers free unlimited mobile data, we are exploring the installation of secure video conferencing systems at intensive care units, and have set up dedicated call centres for health organisations within days, when typically it would take months. We are here to support the NHS in any way we can and keep the UK connected.

Robert Finnegan, CEO of Three said:

NHS workers are doing a phenomenal job on the frontline of the UK's response to Coronavirus. All of us in Three UK are happy to be able to play our part by helping supply the connectivity they need.

Stephen van Rooyen, EVP & CEO, U.K. & Europe, Sky:

The whole UK has come together to back our NHS workers and their incredible, selfless effort. We're proud to be able to support them.

Marc Allera, CEO BT, EE and Plusnet said:

The NHS response to this crisis has been remarkable and an inspiration to the whole country. To show our gratitude, we are giving NHS staff on EE unlimited mobile data, so that they can use it to keep connected without any extra charge. We will also work with the NHS to prioritise new fixed broadband connections or upgrades on BT, EE and Plusnet for doctors and other clinicians that might need it as they shift to home-working and video consultations. To our NHS heroes: we thank you.

Clive Selley, CEO of Openreach, said:

Connecting thousands of NHS locations is already a huge source of pride at Openreach, and we're determined to do even more to support the UK's health and social care heroes. We know that broadband can play a pivotal role in protecting the NHS and enabling crucial services to be delivered at a distance. That's why our engineers are still working tirelessly in communities throughout the UK – maintaining the network and building faster, more reliable

connections to care homes, clinicians, the vulnerable and new NHS sites.

Tristia Harrison, CEO of TalkTalk, said:

Britain's NHS workers are nothing short of heroes and heroines, so TalkTalk is determined to do all we can to provide the best possible connectivity and support their vital work in the fight against coronavirus.

Dana Tobak CBE, CEO of Hyperoptic said:

We're happy to do our bit to support the vital work of our NHS frontline workers who are doing the whole country proud in their selfless work to fight Covid-19. Those NHS workers that register for the scheme and are Hyperoptic customers currently taking our 50Mb and 150Mb products will be upgraded to a 1 Gigabit connection for the duration of the crisis at no extra cost. We hope this will help ensure that those NHS procedures that can be done from home, are done from home over our broadband network.

Greg Mesch, CEO of CityFibre, said:

The Coronavirus crisis has highlighted the nation's increasing need for robust and reliable connectivity that allows us to work, access public services and communicate through online services. CityFibre is proud to join with the rest of the telecoms sector so that thousands of NHS workers will be able to work seamlessly with colleagues around the country, while care home residents will be able to access medical services remotely and help them to keep in touch with the friends and family they can no longer see.

Dale Raneberg, CEO of KCOM said:

As a provider of broadband and voice service to the emergency services and to the people that work in them we are happy to support this initiative to help in the fight against COVID-19. Using our fibre services to increase the efficiency of clinical diagnosis while at the same time keeping NHS staff safe will help address the medical challenges that society faces with the pandemic but also protect the front line teams. We are again pleased to join with industry colleagues in establishing a further package of measures to support the NHS and the dedicated people who are keeping it operational. These measures form a critical part of Government's broader efforts to counteract the threat we face from

COVID-19 and the team at KCOM will continue to work with the public and private partners to overcome it.”

Gareth Williams CEO of Gigaclear said:

We recognise the enormous sacrifice and commitment made by frontline NHS staff at this time of national need and will endeavour to play our part in assisting them as much as we can when they are working at home.

Tom Denyard, CEO of Tesco Mobile said:

We know how hard NHS staff are working at the moment and we want to help keep the frontline staff connected. This is a way to show our appreciation for the remarkable job they’re doing to help the nation. We hope that providing increased connectivity will allow them to continue their incredible efforts – we really can’t thank them enough.

Ash Schofield, CEO at giffgaff said:

Today more than ever before, we are as a country in crisis, relying on the heroics of our wonderful NHS. Our brand mission at giffgaff is to put community first, and it is both our honour and privilege, as part of the telecommunications sector, working alongside our government to support our NHS frontline staff”.

Notes to Editors:

- NHS frontline staff who require greater broadband bandwidth for the purposes of clinical activity or require upgraded data/voice packages from their mobile providers, will be identified without needing to proactively call their communications providers. EE, Vodafone and O2 will set out a process or include further detail on their websites for how customers can self-identify as being NHS staff. All other NHS staff, seeking mobile and/or broadband support, will be identified through a triaging process managed by their own NHS organisations. More detailed information will be given to NHS staff in due course.
- It should be noted that it may take several weeks for the processing of broadband upgrades for clinicians to be completed, but the NHS and industry will work as fast as possible in these unprecedented circumstances.
- NHS frontline staff who are Virgin Media customers do not need to take any action because they have already provided an extra 10GB of data to all their post-pay mobile customers, as well as unlimited voice minutes. Virgin are confident that these changes will meet the requirements of

NHS workers at this time, but in the event that some have extra requirements, they will address these using the NHS managed triage process.

- Sky Mobile customers already receive unlimited calls and texts as part of their standard package. In addition, Sky has given all customers 10GB of additional free data in their Piggybank, which can be shared across all the SIMs on the account.
- Vodafone has proactively upgraded customers who are registered for the Vodafone Advantage NHS discount to free unlimited mobile data. Any NHS staff with a personal Pay Monthly who is currently not flagged on Vodafone's system can still take advantage of this offer via VeryMe on the My Vodafone app, accessible on [Apple](#) and [Android](#).
- EE's offer for all NHS staff launched on Thursday 9th April and runs until 9th October. Any NHS staff that are EE pay monthly customers should sign up direct at www.ee.co.uk/NHS. Other EE, BT and Plusnet customers that are front line staff and seeking similar mobile offers, or seeking improvements or upgrades to fixed connections, should register themselves via the process run by the NHS. BT are committed to supporting the NHS and have donated technology to hospitals, doctors and nurses, as well as connecting the NHS Nightingale Hospital.
- Hyperoptic will upgrade existing 50Mb and 150Mb customers in the qualifying NHS worker roles who register for the scheme to a 1 Gigabit service at the same cost of their existing service for the duration of the Covid-19 emergency.
- Tesco Mobile will support eligible frontline NHS pay monthly customers with 500GB data and 5000 minutes. Live date and T&Cs will be confirmed soon at tescomobile.com/coronavirus and once applied to the customer's account, extra connectivity will be available until 30 June 2020.

[The Dawn Chorus: tune into Nature during lockdown](#)

Natural England is rallying the nation to connect with nature this Easter weekend by tuning into one of nature's most special phenomena: the dawn chorus.

As we firmly emerge from winter into spring this weekend, Britain's most loved and widespread birds including robins, blackbirds and song thrushes will be heard singing to defend their territories and attract a mate for the breeding season.

By simply opening your window an hour before Sunrise, we can all enjoy a slice of nature safely without the need to leave our homes. And the dawn chorus is set to be heard especially loud and clear this Easter, with many of us expected to enjoy fine weather and quieter roads than usual.

Chair of Natural England Tony Juniper said:

Across the UK people can enjoy this vibrant annual manifestation of life happening right next to where we live, including in the heart of our biggest cities.

This wonderful celebration of life is all the more important during this difficult period, when it is so important to appreciate everyday things. Now is an especially good time to connect with this annual natural wonder, when our birds have less competition from the roar of planes and traffic.

The [dawn chorus](#) can be enjoyed annually from March to July, as the increase in daylight switches male songbirds into breeding mode to sing for a mate.

There are many online resources available to help people identify any mystery voices and learn more about the nation's birds, such as on the [RSPB's website](#).

The dawn chorus can also be enjoyed from the garden or whilst exercising – however, people should follow [government guidance on using green spaces and protecting yourself and others](#). The government's priority is to save lives, and the best way to protect yourself and others from illness is to stay at home.

[India charter flights to return thousands more stranded Brits](#)

This follows seven charter flights, already launched, from Goa, Mumbai and New Delhi (8-12 April) and will take the total number of people brought back on these 19 flights to around 5,000.

The first charter flight from India arrived at London Stansted on Thursday morning, bringing back 317 from Goa.

The Foreign Office's Minister of State for South Asia and the Commonwealth, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon said:

We are doing all we can to get thousands of British travellers in India home. This is a huge and complex operation which also involves working with the Indian Government to enable people to move within India to get on these flights.

Over 300 people arrived from Goa on Thursday morning, 1,400 more will arrive over the Easter weekend and these 12 flights next week will bring back thousands more.

The following flights to the UK are scheduled for the next two weeks and British travellers should visit the India Travel Advice pages for further information and to reserve seats:

- Goa – UK: 14, 16 April
- Goa (via Mumbai) -UK: 18 April
- Amritsar – UK: 13, 17, 19 April
- Ahmedabad-UK: 13, 15 April
- Hyderabad (via Ahmedabad) – UK: 17 April
- Chennai (via Bengaluru) – UK: 20 April
- Kolkata (via Delhi) UK: 19 April
- Thiruvananthapuram (via Kochi) – UK: 15 April

The UK Government is working with the airline industry and host governments across the world to help bring back British travellers to the UK as part of the plan announced by the Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab last week (30 March) – with up to £75 million available for special charter flights to priority countries, focused on helping the most vulnerable travellers. So far, charter flights have returned British travellers from the Philippines, Ecuador, Bolivia, Nepal, Ghana, Tunisia, Algeria and Peru.

India, as well as South Africa and Peru, is a priority country for the FCO to arrange charter flights from, with a large number of Britons seeking to return and a lack of commercial options – made more challenging by the size of the country and the restrictions on movement that are in place.

The charter flights are for UK travellers who normally reside in the UK and their direct dependants. A number of seats will be reserved for those deemed vulnerable.

To book flights and register their details, British nationals should visit the [India Travel Advice](#) page and use the city-specific webpages:

- Goa – UK: 14, 16, 18 April (18 April is a Goa-Mumbai-UK flight)
- Amritsar – UK: 13, 17, 19 April
- Ahmedabad – UK: 13, 15 April
- Hyderabad (via Ahmedabad) – UK: 17 April
- Chennai (via Bengaluru) – UK: 20 April
- Kolkata (via Delhi) – UK: 19 April
- Thiruvananthapuram (via Kochi) – UK: 15 April

Movement within India is currently very restricted. The British High Commission will contact those who have confirmed seats on the flight with further details regarding transport.

Those who are eligible to fly will be sent information on getting to airports and flight itineraries directly when their seat is confirmed.

Details regarding luggage allowance, flight costs and carriers will be available on the booking portal.

The British High Commission continues to provide consular support to any British nationals who remain in India. Consular helpline numbers: New Delhi: +91 (11) 2419 2100; Chennai: +91 (44) 42192151; Mumbai/Goa: +91 (22) 6650 2222.

Culture that's worth staying at home for this Easter

- Demand for online content surges as people stay indoors and spend more time online

This Easter weekend, millions of people across the UK will be able to access new arts and culture offerings from their homes as museums and theatres launch special events for the Bank Holiday weekend.

In recent weeks, cultural organisations who have had to close their doors to visitors have continued to engage and entertain audiences online. The series of digital initiatives, ranging from live premieres to literature festivals is helping to make sure that no one is missing out on the best of British creativity by having to stay in.

Culture Secretary, Oliver Dowden, said:

No matter where you are in the UK, our outstanding cultural institutions can keep you entertained throughout the whole Easter weekend.

Thanks to these digital events, you can watch a play, learn a craft or see an exhibition with a world class institution while staying at home, protecting the amazing NHS, and saving lives.

Internet usage has boomed as people stay indoors with broadband providers reporting an up to 65 per cent increase in daytime traffic. This is expected to continue over the Easter long weekend – a time when many would normally be heading outdoors on holiday.

Industry is playing its part and has announced a series of measures to help consumers during this time, including free boosts to data allowances, which will mean even more people can take up the fantastic online offerings from the UK's brilliant arts and cultural organisations.

Easter events to keep you entertained include:

You can see some of this year's top exhibitions and popular shows you may have missed without leaving home.

On Monday 13 April, a new online tour of Tate Britain's Aubrey Beardsley exhibition will launch on the [Tate website](#) and YouTube channel.

From Thursday 9 April, Jane Eyre, the collaboration between Bristol Old Vic and the National Theatre, will be available to watch for one week as part of the [National Theatre At Home](#) programme.

Museums have plenty for families to do over the long weekend from creative craft ideas, like the [V&A's guide](#) to making a paper peepshow, to the Science Museum's [fun experiments](#) that can be done in the kitchen. The Natural History Museum is holding a [Digital Dino Family Festival](#) full of themed crafts for the whole family to try, including T.Rex origami and making footprint cookies.

For a traditional Easter experience, the [National Gallery](#) is telling the story of the Passion through paintings in their collection.

[Historic England](#) has an interactive quiz to help you discover your ideal Easter tradition, from egg rolling to Morris dancing, and learn more about ways we have celebrated this springtime occasion throughout history.

[Sunderland Museum](#) and the [National Glass Centre](#) have teamed up to provide a daily family fun activity including make-your-own decorative Easter eggs.

[Fun Palaces'](#) are collating 'Tiny Revolutions of Connection' – activities suggested from around the UK of things to do with others or in isolation, supporting community connection at a distance.

Wiltshire Creative's Young Ambassadors (14-21) have been working with [Wiltshire Creative](#) staff to plan their first Takeover Festival – an exciting mix of events, performances and activities – over the Easter Holidays.

[Fleabag for Charity](#) – Phoebe Waller-Bridge's stage play Fleabag will be available to watch online on the Soho Theatre's website to raise money for charities helping stop the coronavirus pandemic.

[The Royal Shakespeare Company](#) are streaming a number of productions such as Shakespeare's King Lear and Tim Crouch's I, Cinna. They also run interactive online backstage tours and provide a range of free resources for young people to enable them learn from home, including live lessons on Macbeth and Romeo and Juliet.

On Sat 11 April the [British Museum](#) will host a special virtual version of its monthly, autism-friendly Early Morning Explorers event: a relaxed and sensory-friendly early opening for kids. The online experience will include storytelling.

ENDS

[Covid-19 adoption support fund scheme to help vulnerable families](#)

Adoptive families will be offered emergency support including online counselling and couples therapy as the Government expands the scope of the Adoption Support Fund to meet needs arising from the outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19).

The Education Secretary has today (Friday 10 April) announced that up to £8 million will be available to pay for different types of therapeutic support for families whose adopted children may have already suffered trauma and be made more anxious owing to the uncertainty of the effects of the virus.

It comes as the Department for Education confirms it has spent more than £150 million on the Adoption Support Fund since it was launched in 2015, helping more than 45,000 adoptive and special guardianship order families across the country.

The £8 million fund can be used by local authorities and regional adoption agencies to pay for activities such as virtual peer to peer support, access to helplines, couples therapy and online counselling, given the social distancing measures that have been brought in by the Government to protect the NHS and save lives.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

We are taking urgent action to protect the country from the spread of coronavirus, meaning many of us have seen changes in our daily lives as we practice social distancing and stay at home. For adoptive families, often still adjusting to their new environments, this may create additional strain.

That is why today I am freeing up £8 million from our Adoption Support Fund to pay for therapies that will help families to cope in this uncertain time.

The therapies available through the COVID-19 Adoption Support Fund will be delivered alongside those already offered by the Fund, such as music activities, play therapy and family support sessions. The Fund will be flexible so that local authorities and regional adoption agencies have discretion to spend their share of the money on the support that adoptive families in their areas need most at this time. The funding aims to help fill

gaps in provision caused by the impact of COVID-19, including where local authority staff are unable to attend work due to sickness or self-isolation.

It adds to advice and [guidance](#) published by the Department for Education for professionals working in children's social care to help them meet the needs of their families safely and effectively during the COVID-19 outbreak. The guidance outlines that adoption can still take place, with Regional Adoption Agencies utilising communication technology to continue with the process.

Feedback from the sector shows that adoptive families have been experiencing greater stress due to children with attachment and trauma needs being isolated at home and having their routine disrupted, which can lead to an increase in adoption breakdown and child to parent violence.

Andrew Christie, Chair of the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board, said:

I wholeheartedly welcome this news. Many adopters and special guardians are struggling during the current crisis and this funding will help provide much needed support for them and their families during these difficult times.

The £8 million, which comes from the £45 million 2020-21 budget that was announced by the Education Secretary in December, will fund the temporary COVID-19 scheme.

The funding comes after the Government announced that it would make £1.6 billion available for local authorities to manage the impact of COVID-19, including on children's services.