

New advice to support mental health during coronavirus outbreak

- Public Health England guidance will give helpful tips on how to look after your wellbeing, alongside advice for parents and carers on children's mental health
- Leading mental health charities given £5 million to expand support services
- Plans endorsed by Their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge as part of their commitment to mental health

People struggling with their mental health during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak will be offered additional online support and practical guidance to help them cope, Mental Health Minister Nadine Dorries has announced today.

In recognition of the unprecedented challenges which the outbreak and extended periods of self-isolation can pose, Public Health England has published new [online guidance setting out principles to follow to help people to manage their mental health](#) during this difficult time, such as:

- maintaining contact with friends and family via telephone and video calls, or social media
- keeping a regular routine and sleeping pattern
- focusing on a hobby or learning something new

Parents and carers will also benefit from tailored advice on how to support children and young people with stress during the coronavirus outbreak, which includes providing clear information, being aware of their own reactions and creating a new routine.

Today's guidance has been developed in partnership with leading mental health charities and clinically assured by the NHS. It also includes steps that those living with serious mental health problems can take, including seeking support from their mental health teams.

Their Royal Highnesses The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge said:

The last few weeks have been anxious and unsettling for everyone. We have to take time to support each other and find ways to look after our mental health. It is great to see the mental health sector working together with the NHS to help people keep on top of their mental well-being. By pulling together and taking simple steps each day, we can all be better prepared for the times ahead.

The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge have long been advocates for mental health, through their respective patronages and The Royal Foundation's Heads Together campaign. In 2019, Their Royal Highnesses helped to launch Public Health England's mental health platform, Every Mind Matters.

Minister for Mental Health Nadine Dorries said:

When I discovered I had coronavirus I felt anxious and scared.

For those who already suffer with anxiety or other mental health issues this may present new and difficult challenges.

It's imperative that we stay home if we are to beat coronavirus and save lives. I know how important it is that people have support to look after their mental health and this guidance will be of huge value.

The government has also announced a £5 million grant for leading mental health charities, administered by Mind, to fund additional services for people struggling with their mental wellbeing during this time. This could include telephone and online support services for the most isolated and vulnerable in our communities.

Public Health England has updated its world-leading Every Mind Matters platform with specific advice on maintaining good mental wellbeing during the outbreak. People can also complete a 'Mind Plan', a quick and free tool that has already been completed over 1.8 million times.

Yvonne Doyle, Medical Director at Public Health England, said:

During these challenging times, it is natural for all of us to feel worried or anxious, but there are things we can all do to help ourselves and others, to prevent these feelings from becoming more serious.

We should continue to check up on friends, family and neighbours by phone or online and pursue the activities we are able to do from home and in line with guidance. By adopting a new routine, setting goals, eating healthily and maintaining physical activity, we can stay in good mental health today and tomorrow.

The government and NHS England recognise that the mental health impacts of the coronavirus outbreak are significant and are working closely with mental health trusts to ensure those who need them have access to NHS mental health services.

This includes issuing guidance to trusts on staff training, prioritisation of services and how to maximise use of digital and virtual channels to keep delivering support to patients. NHS Mental Health providers are also establishing 24/7 helplines.

Mind will use their existing links with other charities, including grassroots, user-led organisations, to reach vulnerable groups who are at particular risk during this period. This is expected to include older adults,

people with an underlying health condition and anyone experiencing unstable employment and housing conditions.

Paul Farmer, chief executive of Mind and co-ordinating a group of mental health charities, said:

We are facing one of the toughest ever times for our mental wellbeing as a nation. It is absolutely vital that people pull together and do all they can to look after themselves and their loved ones, when we are all facing a huge amount of change and uncertainty. Reaching out to friends and family is critical, as well as paying attention to the impact our physical health can have on our mental health – from diet and exercise to getting enough natural light and a little fresh air.

Charities like Mind have a role to play in helping people cope not only with the initial emergency but coming to terms with how this will affect us well into the future. Whether we have an existing mental health problem or not, we are all going to need extra help to deal with the consequences of this unprecedented set of circumstances.

Claire Murdoch, NHS mental health director, said:

The NHS is stepping up to offer people help when and how they need it, including by phone, facetime, skype or digitally enabled therapy packages and we also have accelerated plans for crisis response service 24/7.

We are determined to respond to people's needs during this challenging time and working with our partners across the health sector and in the community, NHS mental health services will be there through what is undoubtedly one of the greatest healthcare challenges the NHS has ever faced.

Notes to editors:

Government Chemist and IGFS (QUB) collaborate on coconut water authenticity

- Only go outside for food, health reasons or work (but only if you cannot

work from home)

- If you go out, stay 2 metres (6ft) away from other people at all times
- Wash your hands as soon as you get home

Do not meet others, even friends or family.

You can spread the virus even if you don't have symptoms.

First food parcels delivered to clinically vulnerable people

- Government confirms first boxes have been delivered to those at highest risk from coronavirus as biggest effort to deliver supplies to those in need since World War Two begins.
- 1.5m clinically vulnerable people have been advised by the NHS to stay at home for 12 weeks and be shielded from coronavirus. 900,000 vulnerable people have received letters from the NHS giving them guidance this week
- First of 50,000 free food boxes containing essential supplies and household items such as pasta and tinned goods will be delivered this weekend

The first food boxes have been delivered to those vulnerable people being shielded from coronavirus as the Government moved to support those most in need, Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick announced today (Sunday 29 March).

The first 2,000 food parcels have already been delivered this weekend to those who cannot leave their homes because severe health conditions leave them most vulnerable to the virus.

More parcels are expected to go out next week from wholesalers across the country, bringing the first set of deliveries to more than 50,000. Depending on demand, hundreds of thousands of boxes could be delivered each week.

The packages contain essential food and household items such as pasta, fruit, tinned goods and biscuits, for those who need to self-isolate at home for 12 weeks but have no support network of family or friends to help them.

Since Monday, 900,000 extremely vulnerable people received letters from the NHS giving them guidance on how to shield from coronavirus. In total up to 1.5m will be asked to be shielded in this way. Others who did not receive letters but think they are part of this clinically vulnerable group should contact their GP.

It is part of a support network the Government is working around the clock to establish across the country, spearheaded by the Communities Secretary Robert

Jenrick.

Communities Secretary, Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

This weekend sees the start of extraordinary steps to support the most clinically vulnerable, while they shield from coronavirus.

We will support these people at this difficult time, and the scale of an operation like that has not been seen since the Second World War.

This is an unprecedented package of support and I want to thank the food suppliers, local councils and everyone who has come together to create this essential service in just a matter of days.

Andrew Selley, CEO of Bidfood, and Hugo Mahoney, CEO of Brakes, said:

At a time of national crisis the foodservice industry's two largest distributors are coming together to work with the Government to create packages of food and essential supplies that will be delivered to vulnerable people as part of the Local Support System.

In these difficult times, we're proud to join forces and play such a vital role in supporting people in need during their period of isolation. Together we are experts in food service and our distribution networks reach into every corner of the country. Our highly professional drivers and warehouse teams will be keeping the wheels turning in this vital national endeavour.

The government is working with a partnership of the food industry, local government, local resilience and emergency partners, and voluntary groups, to ensure that essential items can be delivered to those who need it.

Medicines will be delivered by community pharmacies and groceries and essential household items by food distributors, working with supermarkets, to ensure they do not worry about getting the food that they need.

The parcels, which will be left on the doorstep, will include pasta, cornflakes, tea bags, tinned fruit, apples, rolls of loo roll and biscuits.

- Food deliveries are currently part of a national service, as part of a wide range of support for extremely vulnerable people and are being organised by government in partnership with the grocery industry, local government and local resilience forums.
- Local authorities are working across the country with local partners and voluntary groups to meet their communities' needs.
- Those who request it will receive ongoing communications to reassure them that their ongoing medical needs will be met by the NHS.
- Community pharmacies are continuing to supply medicines.

- Those in need of social contact will have their details passed to local authority hubs, who will make contact and offer support.
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Government agrees measures with telecoms companies to support vulnerable consumers through COVID-19

Following constructive discussions with the Digital Secretary and Ofcom, the UK's major telecommunications providers have today agreed a set of important commitments to support and protect vulnerable consumers and those who may become vulnerable due to circumstances arising from Covid-19.

The UK's major internet service and mobile providers, namely BT/EE, Openreach, Virgin Media, Sky, TalkTalk, 02, Vodafone, Three, Hyperoptic, Gigaclear, and KCOM have all agreed the following commitments, effective immediately:

- All providers have committed to working with customers who find it difficult to pay their bill as a result of Covid-19 to ensure that they are treated fairly and appropriately supported.
- All providers will remove all data allowance caps on all current fixed broadband services.
- All providers have agreed to offer some new, generous mobile and landline packages to ensure people are connected and the most vulnerable continue to be supported. For example, some of these packages include data boosts at low prices and free calls from their landline or mobile.
- All providers will ensure that vulnerable customers or those self-isolating receive alternative methods of communication wherever possible if priority repairs to fixed broadband and landlines cannot be carried out.

These commitments are in addition to a range of supportive measures offered by the individual providers to their customers affected by circumstances arising from Covid-19.

Digital Secretary Oliver Dowden said:

It's fantastic to see mobile and broadband providers pulling together to do their bit for the national effort by helping customers, particularly the most vulnerable, who may be struggling with bills at this difficult time.

It is essential that people stay at home to protect the NHS and save lives. This package helps people to stay connected whilst they stay home.

Melanie Dawes, CEO of Ofcom said:

We recognise providers are dealing with unprecedented challenges at the moment. So we welcome them stepping up to protect vulnerable customers, at a time when keeping in touch with our friends and families has never been more important. We'll continue to work with Government and industry to help make sure people stay connected.

Marc Allera, CEO of BT's Consumer division said:

The service and connectivity that BT provides are more critical today than they ever have been in our lifetime. During this national and global crisis, our priorities are the safety of our colleagues and ensuring that our customers, particularly those that are vulnerable, stay connected. Within the last week or so we focused on implementing a range of initiatives and additional services for our most vulnerable customers and we are pleased to support these sector-wide commitments.

None of this happens without the dedication of our brilliant teams. I'm particularly grateful to our committed contact centre colleagues who are fielding unprecedented call volumes and helping our customers stay connected.

Clive Selley, CEO of Openreach said:

With connections to more than 24 million customer premises across the UK, we know our network is critical. We'll do everything we can to keep people connected while prioritising our support for critical public services, vulnerable customers and those without a working line.

Thankfully a large amount of the work we do – including fixing faults, adding capacity and building faster, more reliable full fibre networks – can be completed outside, so you'll still see Openreach engineers working to maintain service across the UK.

Lutz Schöler, CEO of Virgin Media said:

In these unprecedented times we know how important connectivity is to people's lives. Alongside the many other steps we're already taking, we're committed to helping our most vulnerable customers and ensuring they are supported as much as possible as we work tirelessly to keep the country connected.

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

There has never been a more important time for people to stay connected. We will play our part to help everyone stay in contact with their loved ones and to ensure vulnerable people can access the help and information they need.

Tristia Harrison, CEO of TalkTalk, said:

At this time of uncertainty across the country, nobody should have to worry about connection to friends and loved ones. That's why TalkTalk is dedicated to treating customers – whether consumers or businesses – with fairness and compassion, so they don't fear losing service if current circumstances mean they're struggling financially. We have also established a priority contact line for vulnerable customers, so they can reach us when they need.

At a time where other bills may be going up, TalkTalk will not be adding inflation to standard bills from 1st April. And while people may need to use more landline calls, they will never pay over our low and fixed price package so that there are no nasty surprises.

It's more important than ever that we all work together to keep Britain connected, and TalkTalk is proud to play our part as a provider of this critical national service.

Mark Evans, CEO of Telefonica UK (O2), said:

I'm delighted to see the industry and government working together to help the UK at this critical time. At O2 we have long-established policies in place to support our customers, and right now, digital connectivity is more important than ever as we connect our customers to vital services and their loved ones.

Nick Jeffery, CEO of Vodafone UK said:

Whether you are at home, working from home or a key worker,

Vodafone is committed to keeping the UK connected. We know that our technology is making a real difference in helping people through this health crisis. We are committed to supporting those customers vulnerable to COVID-19, enabling them to keep in contact with friends and family and live their lives as best as possible. We are here for them.

Robert Finnegan, CEO of Three said:

We take our responsibility to keep our customers connected during this time very seriously and are providing the government with our full support where possible. I am committed to ensuring that all of our customers are treated fairly and that they are supported by Three.

Dana Tobak CBE, CEO of Hyperoptic said:

Staying connected in these unprecedented times is of crucial importance to society. Our engineers are showing great commitment to provide an essential service to society and value the support and understanding they are receiving from members of the public. We are pleased to commit to these measures to help support the most vulnerable members of society, who must of course take priority in these circumstances.

Gareth Williams, CEO of Gigaclear said:

Gigaclear are proud to be playing a vital role in building and maintaining the UK's digital infrastructure. We are working with our industry partners to support both our residential and business customers who are relying on our service now more than ever. In addition to the measures set out here, we are increasing the speeds of our customers currently on 30mbps products, as well as prioritising vulnerable customers who make themselves known to us.

Dale Raneberg, CEO of KCOM said:

As a provider of services people are relying on now more than ever, we are committed to keeping our customers connected throughout Covid-19 and determined in particular to support and protect vulnerable consumers and those who may become vulnerable as a result of it.

We acted quickly to lift data caps and to provide reassurance that we will assist customers facing financial pressure over the period ahead to ensure they continue to have access to essential

communications services.

We are pleased to join with industry colleagues in putting in place the additional measures announced today and to back the Government's wider efforts to address this issue we now all face.

PM letter to nation on coronavirus

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1. 6 April 2020

Addition of Bengali translation.

2. 6 April 2020

Somali translation of PM's letter to the nation added.

3. 3 April 2020

Addition of large print version.

4. 3 April 2020

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