

Regulations temporarily suspended to fast-track supplies of PPE to NHS staff and protect companies hit by COVID-19

On 14 May, the government announced:

- the temporary suspension of wrongful trading liability will now continue until 30 June
- temporary measures to give companies and other bodies flexibility around Annual General Meetings (AGMs) and other meetings will be made retrospective to 26 March

This page was updated on 14 May to reflect these changes.

- Business Secretary eases requirements to ensure hand sanitiser and personal protective equipment reaches NHS staff more quickly
- by cutting red tape, new companies will be able to produce and distribute safe hand sanitiser within a matter of days
- government also announces it will amend insolvency law to give companies breathing space and keep trading while they explore options for rescue

New measures announced today will give vital support to frontline NHS staff battling COVID-19 and support businesses under pressure as a result of the coronavirus outbreak.

To help get personal protective equipment (PPE) and hand sanitiser to NHS staff as quickly as possible, Business Secretary Alok Sharma is easing administrative requirements and barriers to imports of these essential tools, without compromising on their safety.

By reducing the amount of red tape, new suppliers and businesses that produce ingredients for safe hand sanitiser and PPE will be able to bring their products to market in a matter of days.

Companies including Brewdog and Ineos have already stepped forward to offer their services in creating hand sanitiser. This week HMRC confirmed manufacturers of hand sanitisers and gels will have their applications for denatured alcohol fast-tracked.

Efforts to boost availability of essential supplies involve temporary measures including:

- asking the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and Local Authorities to fast-track PPE through the product safety assessment process and prioritise this activity over other market surveillance activity
- allowing PPE equipment providing protection against COVID-19 which lack

the CE mark onto the market provided products meet essential safety requirements

- providing new guidance for local authorities and ports and borders enforcement officers on the import and safety testing of hand sanitiser

The Business Secretary has also announced he will make changes to enable UK companies undergoing a rescue or restructure process to continue trading, giving them breathing space that could help them avoid insolvency.

This will also include enabling companies to continue buying much-needed supplies, such as energy, raw materials or broadband, while attempting a rescue, and temporarily suspending wrongful trading provisions retrospectively from 1 March 2020 for three months for company directors so they can keep their businesses going without the threat of personal liability.

Business Secretary Alok Sharma said:

The government is doing everything in its power to save lives and protect livelihoods during these unprecedented times.

Applying a common-sense approach to regulation will ensure products are safe and reach the market without any unnecessary delay, getting vital protective equipment such as face masks to frontline staff as quickly as possible.

Today's measures will also reduce the burden on business, giving bosses much-needed breathing space to keep their workers employed and their companies going.

Commenting on the new PPE rules, James Watt, Co-Founder of BrewDog said:

We started making hand sanitiser at our distillery in Ellon, Aberdeenshire in response to the national shortage and are providing it free to charities and frontline workers.

We really welcome the government's announcements today, which will mean that making this crucial product will become a much faster and easier process.

The government's flexibility in these unprecedented times allows us to do even more to help those most in need.

Commenting on the new PPE rules Sir Jim Ratcliffe INEOS Chairman said:

We welcome today's announcement. These measures will help INEOS as we build two factories in the UK and Germany in under 10 days, to produce and supply substantial quantities of hand sanitiser gel to the NHS for free.

INEOS is a company with enormous resources and manufacturing skills. If we can find other ways to help in the Coronavirus battle, we are absolutely committed to playing our part.

Speaking about the reforms to insolvency law, Matthew Fell, Chief UK Policy Director, Confederation of British Industry, said:

The CBI welcomes these interventions at a critical time for business. The temporary suspension of wrongful trading provisions, along with other measures, will give much needed headroom for company directors to enable otherwise viable businesses to use the government's support package and weather this crisis.

The Business Secretary also announced that the government will introduce legislation to ensure those companies required by law to hold Annual General Meetings (AGMs) will be able to do so safely, consistent with the restrictions on movement and gatherings introduced to address the spread of coronavirus.

Companies will temporarily be extended greater flexibilities, including holding AGMs online or postponing the meetings. These temporary measures will apply retrospectively from 26 March, subject to successful passage of the upcoming Corporate Insolvency and Governance Bill.

This measure follows an announcement earlier this week that companies would automatically and immediately be granted a three-month extension to the filing of their accounts following a fast-track online process.

Over 10,000 businesses have already successfully applied for the extension.

Notes to editors

The Office for Product Safety and Standards, part of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, is the government regulator responsible for the safety of consumer products in the UK. It has written to Local Authorities and HSE to ask them to prioritise equipment which is essential to the NHS.

The government previously consulted on changes to the corporate insolvency regime and [announced plans to introduce new insolvency restructuring procedures in August 2018](#). The new legislation will implement these plans, including a short moratorium or 'breathing space' that will give companies in difficulty time to explore options for rescue.

Current insolvency rules stipulate that directors of limited liability companies can become personally liable for business debts if they continue to trade when uncertain about whether their businesses can continue to meet their debts. Relaxation of these wrongful trading rules will reassure directors that the difficult decisions they have to make about the future viability of their business will not have to be unduly influenced by the

exceptional circumstances which are entirely beyond their control.

Legislation to introduce these changes will be introduced in Parliament at the earliest opportunity. Provisions will be included to enable the changes to be extended if necessary.

HMRC relaxed rules on alcohol duty

[HMRC announced on 18 March](#) that manufacturers of hand sanitisers and gels will have their applications for denatured alcohol fast-tracked during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

Under new measures, HMRC is fast-tracking applications so that manufacturers wanting to produce hand sanitising products can be quickly authorised.

Additional information on changes to insolvency laws:

Under the plans, the UK's Insolvency Framework will add new restructuring tools including:

- a moratorium for companies giving them breathing space for from creditors enforcing their debts for a period of time whilst they seek a rescue or restructure;
- protection of their supplies to enable them to continue trading during the moratorium; and;
- a new restructuring plan, binding creditors to that plan

The proposals will include key safeguards for creditors and suppliers to ensure they are paid while a solution is sought.

The government will also temporarily suspend the wrongful trading provisions to give company directors greater confidence to use their best endeavours to continue to trade during this pandemic emergency, without the threat of personal liability should the company ultimately fall into insolvency. This suspension will be retrospective to 1 March and will now continue until 30 June, subject to passage of the upcoming Corporate Insolvency and Governance Bill.

Existing laws for fraudulent trading and the threat of director disqualification will continue to act as an effective deterrent against director misconduct.

Additional quotes:

Jennifer Marshall, president of the Insolvency Lawyers Association and chair of the City of London Law Society Insolvency Sub-Committee said:

We welcome and support these proposals. Suspending wrongful trading, in particular, will assist directors in accessing Government or bank funding without concerns regarding personal liability.

The insolvency profession in the UK is hugely talented and these reforms, together with existing rescue tools such as administration, could really assist in saving livelihoods.

Norman Tenray, CEO of Obas UK and Non-Executive Director of North and Western Lancashire Chamber of Commerce said:

I am delighted that the Business Secretary and UK Government has today taken hugely positive action in suspending the regulations for the importing of much needed PPE equipment.

This will help me to do more to protect our hard-working Doctors and Nurses at this extremely challenging time.

I am aware of a number of overseas manufacturers who have NHS standard protective products and equipment ready and waiting for dispatch which could reach our shores even more quickly now as a result of the government's excellent announcements today.

Coronavirus (COVID-19): letter from the Secretary of State to the social care workforce

- 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.

Response to the Financial Times article on ventilators

The 28/03/20 edition of FT Weekend contains a number of inaccurate claims about the UK's efforts to procure and manufacture ventilators in response to

the COVID-19 public health emergency.

To date, there are more than 8,000 ventilators available to NHS patients, with another 8,000 expected from existing international manufacturers in the coming weeks. We have also been clear that the UK must step up production of ventilators even further to support the UK's response to the virus and save lives.

The government has partnered with a number of the UK's leading technology and engineering firms with smaller manufacturers to rapidly build existing, modified or newly designed ventilators at speed, with seven priority projects underway. They are working to improve the speed at which current UK ventilator manufacturers can produce their devices, with larger companies changing their existing operations to help provide the UK with the equipment and personnel it needs for this effort. Many other UK manufacturers are building, designing and developing new effective, safe and easy-to-build ventilators – all orders from the government will be subject to them passing stringent safety tests.

The government's overriding aim is to protect the NHS and save lives.

Claim:

Several companies have complained that offers were not taken up to provide some of the additional machines needed to save the lives of people with acute respiratory difficulties caused by Covid-19.

Response:

The response we've had from British industry has been nothing short of incredible, with an overwhelming response from companies offering help including designing and building new devices, manufacturing components or transporting them to NHS hospitals. To say we have ignored suppliers is wrong – we have responded to all companies that contacted us with offers of help. We are working with a number of firms to scale up production of existing UK ventilator manufacturers, as well as designing and manufacturing new products from scratch, and procuring thousands more machines from overseas.

Claim:

The Government should have been in touch with companies sooner and has now missed out.

Response:

We would expect suppliers of ventilator parts, like MEC Medical, to receive orders from companies for some of the components needed to scale up production of UK ventilator manufacturers.

Claim:

The Government doesn't follow through with their promises that they'll buy any new ventilators.

Response:

This is untrue. We have over 8,000 machines arriving in the coming weeks and we are working to procure more everyday. We are also working alongside industry to scale up existing UK manufacturing and, simultaneously, design and manufacture new products. Of course, any new orders are all dependent on machines passing regulatory tests. We are rapidly ramping up ventilator production in response to this crisis.

Anyone who has existing ventilator stock and can support should [email here](#) and if you want to offer wider support visit [this page](#).

Claim:

The Government didn't get in touch quickly and now the lead in times for ventilators from abroad are months away.

Response:

Many distributors are offering us plans for future supply from overseas, but unfortunately many of these simply did not stand up to due diligence, where safety of our citizens is of paramount importance. However, the government has been successful in recent days buying directly from factories. Indeed we took a delivery from a manufacturer in an EU member state just this week. Of course we have bought from agents where that is not possible.

We are doing whatever it takes to protect the NHS and save lives.

[COVID-19: Answers to Frequently Asked Questions by British Nationals in Pakistan](#)

We know that there are a large number of British nationals in Pakistan who want to return to the UK.

We are doing everything we can to help you right now – but please be aware we, like other High Commissions and Embassies, are experiencing a high number of enquiries right now during this global crisis.

What is the latest advice from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London on travel abroad?

All British tourists and short-stay travellers currently abroad should return to the UK where commercial flight options are still available. If you are a permanent resident in Pakistan, you should stay and follow the advice of the local authorities.

What is the FCO centrally doing to help?

The FCO is working around the clock to support all British travellers come back to the UK. The UK government is working with airlines to keep routes open and is calling for international action to keep air routes open for a sufficient period of time to enable international travellers to return on commercial flights.

What is the latest situation in Pakistan on flight connections back to the UK? Are any commercial operators still flying from Pakistan?

On 21 March, the government of Pakistan announced the suspension of all international flights to Pakistan, until 2000 PST on 4 April. The government of Pakistan described the measure as a 'temporary suspension imposed due to exceptional circumstances'. We understand that the suspension applies also to international flights out of Pakistan.

Despite this suspension, Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) announced flights from Islamabad to the UK operating on 28 March. We understand that PIA has now cancelled these flights. The British High Commission is discussing this with the Government of Pakistan. Having already operated flights on 25 and 26 March, we understand Qatar Airways was planning to operate daily flights from Islamabad until 3 April, but these flights will now run only until 29 March. The last Qatar Airways flight is now QR633 at 0305 on 29 March. After this, all international flights out of Pakistan are suspended until 2000 PST on 4 April.

Will I be able to travel to the airport, due to internal travel restrictions in Pakistan right now?

If you have a confirmed flight ticket and valid travel document, Provincial and Federal authorities have assured us that you will be able to travel to the airport. Some provinces have limited the number of people that can be in a vehicle and, excepting a driver, other non-travellers may not be allowed to travel.

What should I do about booking a flight after April 4?

The situation on the ground is changing all the time. We are in close contact with the Government of Pakistan and will update our guidance as soon as more information becomes available. Please also stay in contact with your airline.

My visa has expired as I couldn't get out of Pakistan. What should I do?

Foreign nationals of Pakistani origin are eligible for a free grace period

for up to four weeks and this is processed at the airport upon departure. The Government of Pakistan has issued a notice that all foreign nationals whose visa has expired and who have overstayed should request a visa extension from an immigration officer at departures.

The information is changing so quickly. How do I keep updated?

Please sign up for alerts on [travel advice](#) and follow our social media channels [@ukinpakistan](#) for the latest information.

I need urgent help on a medical matter – what should I do?

If you are running out of medication or have medical needs, you should speak to your travel insurance company for advice and seek local medical assistance, including from pharmacies. Your GP / UK doctor may be able to advise of alternative medication if yours is not available in Pakistan.

What are the official guidelines now on social distancing in Pakistan now?

Pakistani authorities have introduced a number of measures to limit the spread of the virus including school closures, and banning public gatherings. Some provincial authorities are introducing additional measures, including requiring residents to stay at home, and closing shops and restaurants. Measures are particularly stringent in Sindh and Punjab.

On 25 March, Islamabad Capital Territory announced additional measures, including a ban on public transport, except taxis and the ICT Metro Bus, and a ban on public and private social and religious gatherings. British Nationals should follow the Federal and relevant Provincial guidance, and monitor local media for updates. Movements should be planned accordingly.

Will we be able to buy food, water, medicines or other essentials during the shutdown here?

The Government of Pakistan has announced that food, medicines and other necessary supplies will continue to remain available during the lockdown period.

I can't get through to you on the phone. Why aren't you answering?

We are receiving a high volume of calls and are doing our best to answer all of them. If you are calling to ask about flights or about local restrictions, please sign up to our Travel Advice updates and keep in touch with your airline and travel agent. If you are in urgent need of assistance, please call us on +92 (0)51 2012000 or use this [link](#) to contact us in writing.

I have a very compelling case to get back to the UK but I have a visa issue. What should I do?

Customers with immigration questions, including questions about urgent, compelling, compassionate cases should contact: CIH@homeoffice.gov.uk

Culture at your fingertips from home

- Across the UK, arts organisations, museums and theatres are unveiling innovative digital plans to ensure culture and creativity is accessible for all
- Online offerings to the public set to increase over the coming weeks thanks to Arts Council England's £160m support package and the DCMS funded Digital Culture Network

Over the past week, arts and cultural organisations have launched a range of digital initiatives to ensure extraordinary national collections and performances can be enjoyed by everyone whilst following the latest guidance from public health experts to stay at home.

The range of online opportunities spans theatre, dance, opera, literature, museums and fine arts, all of which can be accessed at the click of a button, from the homes of millions of people across the UK and the rest of the world.

Culture Secretary, Oliver Dowden, said:

The UK's cultural sector is one of our great global calling cards, and these new digital initiatives are ensuring they will continue to be enjoyed by people across the country and around the globe in these difficult times.

Thanks to the innovation shown by our world class cultural institutions, we can continue to enjoy the fantastic work of UK artists as we all do our bit to stay at home, save lives and protect our incredible NHS.

Offers include:

- A number of DCMS-sponsored museums and galleries, including the British Museum and National Gallery, are offering virtual tours of their permanent displays, ensuring the national collection remains accessible for all.
- Under the hashtag, #ConnectedByArt, the Government Art Collection will be sharing images of artworks currently on display in government buildings around the world, helping to start important conversations around loneliness and isolation.
- Sadler's Wells is sharing new content on its "Digital Stage", including digital premieres of full-length dance performances, screendance – choreography designed for film – and new dance workshops that have been specially created for families with young children and the over 60s to take part in at home.
- The National Theatre's "National Theatre At Home", an initiative which

makes a selection of much-loved National Theatre Live productions available to stream for free on YouTube.

- City Arts in Nottingham has developed a free app which features artworks and artefacts from collections across the UK, including the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, The Lowry and the Pitt Rivers Museum. The app, available on Apple and Android devices, also has special features for users with dementia.
- The Royal Opera House is offering a free programme of curated online broadcasts, musical masterclasses and cultural insights, as well as free, weekly ballet and opera productions streamed on demand via Facebook and YouTube.
- BFI Player is offering a 2 week free trial for everyone to enjoy the best classic and contemporary world cinema with curated selections from Parasite director Bong Joon-ho, Tilda Swinton and Mark Kermode, 1000's of free archive films through Britain on Film and a special BFI Flare at Home online festival from the 2020 edition, including filmmaker Q&A's and Spotify playlists
- The Southbank Centre's new weekly "Culture Fix" shares literature, music and visual arts content with subscribers. This week's edition included podcasts with Louis Theroux and Hilary Mantel as well as playlists and archive imagery of past Hayward Gallery exhibitions.
- Sage Gateshead is linking up with 25 concert halls as part of the European Concert Hall network to stream archive performances on social media every evening.
- From Monday 6 April, six rotating Shakespeare's Globe productions will be available to watch for free on the theatre's video-on-demand service, Globe Player. Featured films will be captioned to make sure they are as accessible as possible. The Globe Player will also host all 37 'Complete Walk' short films for free.
- Projects have been developed to inspire creativity in the home, for instance 64 Million Artists have set up 'Create to Connect' with daily creative challenges to participate in and Fun Palaces have set up Tiny Revolutions of Connection, looking at how to use creativity to support those who are self-isolating both online and offline.

The UK's cultural sector has been supported in developing its digital content over the last year through the support of the [Digital Tech Champions](#) network – a DCMS funded initiative as part of the Digital Culture Network. These champions are now working remotely and can provide cultural organisations with one-to-one support and resources on:

- working and collaborating remotely
- keeping up engagement with audiences
- strategies for generating income for the sector through online retail and donations
- digital strategy, data analysis, and search engine marketing

The Government will support digital content offerings to increase over the coming weeks, for instance by enabling funding to contribute to Arts Council England's (ACE) £160m support package, part of which is funding the development of creative responses to the Covid-19 crisis through

participatory digital content for people self-isolating.

In addition, as part of BBC Arts' [Culture in Quarantine](#) initiative the BBC and ACE has created an artist fund that will commission and distribute around 25 new works by independent artists.

The Culture Diary is also compiling a list of online arts events which will be regularly updated during this period. You can view the full list [here](#).

Notes to Editors

The Chancellor announced that music venues and theatres, along with any other business in the hospitality and leisure sector with a rateable value of less than £51,000, will pay no business rates for 12 months and will be eligible for cash grants of up to £25,000 during this period.

Arts Council England (ACE) announced a £160 million emergency response fund, made possible by Government funding, to complement the package of financial support set out by the Chancellor. The ACE funding will focus on stabilising arts and cultural organisations, as well as supporting freelancers and individual artists.

This week, the BFI, PRS for Music and Musicians' Union all launched funds to provide further support to the creative industries.