

# Coronavirus (COVID-19) – update on VOA services

The outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19) is causing unprecedented disruption to public services, businesses and individuals across the country.

The majority of our employees are equipped to work from home and are doing so to avoid unnecessary travel and social contact. We are operating as close to normal as possible and are prioritising work related to coronavirus.

We are working hard to manage queries online and via email, but it is taking longer than usual to respond to customers. We would like to apologise to anyone who might be affected by changes to our services.

## **Support for ratepayers**

The Government has published [guidance for employees, employers and businesses, including a 12-month business rates holiday](#) for certain sectors of businesses in England and a package of funding and loans. Further [support has also been announced for certain small businesses](#) previously outside the scope of the business grant funds scheme.

Any enquiries on eligibility for, or provision of the reliefs should be directed to your local council. The Welsh Government has also published [guidance for businesses](#) in Wales.

Please note we are currently unable to offer telephone support or accept hardcopy post. If you need to contact us please use the [Contact Form](#), which also contains links to useful self-help guidance. It is taking us longer than usual to respond to customers but please be assured that we will get back to you as soon as we can.

We provide a range of reasonable adjustments to customers where they are required. Customers can let us know through the Contact Form or ask a friend or family member to complete on their behalf.

## **Face-to-face appointments**

Property inspections are being put on pause and we are focusing on gathering the information we need remotely, where it does not add an additional burden on our customers.

We are unable to accommodate requests to view hard copy rental information we hold, such as Rent and Lease Details, Forms of Return and proposal forms.

## **Penalties**

We are cancelling outstanding penalties in regards to non-compliance with

requests for rent, lease or ownership details. For hardship cases, we are being as flexible as we can with customers when we require information.

## Keeping you updated

We continue to monitor this situation as it develops and will publish any new or updated guidance.

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## Uncertainty toolkit

The Government Actuary's Department (GAD) has helped to develop a new toolkit for analysts. The [Uncertainty Toolkit for Analysts in Government](#) is for use when they're confronted by a problem that includes elements of uncertainty.

GAD worked with 8 other government departments and a public sector organisation to develop and refine the advice and guidance.

### Step by step

The toolkit's structure means that it breaks down the process of conducting analysis involving uncertainty into a 4-step process:

- agreeing how uncertainty should be used to help answer the question
- defining and identifying uncertainty
- measuring and understanding uncertainty
- presenting and communicating uncertainty

For each step the toolkit guides the analyst with examples and explanations. It provides key points to consider and suggestions of actions to take.

### Uncertainty and analysis

Most of the projects that government analysts work on contain inherent uncertainty. Analysis should be conducted taking this uncertainty into account.

The results of the analysis need to be communicated to decision-makers in government in a clear way to ensure the nature of the uncertainty and subsequent results are understood.

The toolkit helps analysts to do this, and in doing so is designed to ensure that properly informed decisions can be made.

### Working together

Scott Waygood, who leads on this project in GAD said: "The development of

this toolkit has really been a great collaboration by people in a wide range of government departments and other organisations.

“We’ve brought together evidence and best practice from across the analytical community, both within and outside of government, and we’ll continue to work on improving the guidance in response to feedback we’ve received.”

The toolkit, which is an ongoing project, is the result of extensive research and discussions around good practice for dealing with and communicating uncertainty.

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## [Contact the Government Legal Department electronically](#)



Due to the current national situation with coronavirus (COVID-19), the Government Legal Department (GLD) would appreciate any documentation being sent by e-mail rather than by post to avoid handling of materials.

GLD would strongly prefer electronic service of new legal proceedings in the UK that are required to be served on the Treasury Solicitor.

New Legal Proceedings in the UK which are required to be served on the Treasury solicitor can be served as follows:

### **For all new legal proceedings issued in the UK except for new immigration proceedings:**

By email at: [newproceedings@governmentlegal.gov.uk](mailto:newproceedings@governmentlegal.gov.uk) for all new legal proceedings issued in the UK except for new immigration proceedings which are dealt with below. GLD would be grateful if, where possible, all new proceedings were served electronically and hardcopy documents were not sent to our postal address.

## **For new immigration proceedings i.e.:**

- Immigration High Court judicial reviews
- Immigration habeas corpus applications
- Immigration family court proceedings
- Appeals to the Court of Appeal challenging Immigration Upper Tribunal Appeal decisions

Please email [ImmigrationAdminTeam@governmentlegal.gov.uk](mailto:ImmigrationAdminTeam@governmentlegal.gov.uk)

The reference to service of cost claims on the Home Office above is to formally served claims for costs (Notice of Commencement and Bill) against the Home Office (SSHD) pursuant to costs orders made in the above listed types of proceedings and Immigration Upper Tribunal judicial review proceedings. This does not include informal claims or negotiation of costs which should be directed to the GLD case officer. Where the GLD case officer is known to the party serving the costs proceedings the GLD case officer should also be copied in to the email.

## **For immigration judicial reviews:**

Immigration judicial reviews issued in the Immigration Upper Tribunal should be served on the Home Office.

New claims which would normally only be posted or delivered by hand to the Home Office at 6 New Square, Bedford Lakes, TW14 8HA can now be sent by email to [UKVIJudicialReview@homeoffice.gov.uk](mailto:UKVIJudicialReview@homeoffice.gov.uk). Where other instructions regarding service have been provided on decision notices or an immigration factual summary these should continue to be followed.

Please note the email addresses above are solely for the service of new proceedings. For all proceedings (including in the Supreme Court) once a GLD case officer has been allocated the case all subsequent service, save for formal costs claims in Immigration proceedings (see above), should be effected on their, or any nominated successor's, GLD email address. Where you have served by email please do not send hard copy duplicates of any documents.

These email addresses are not to be used for any correspondence whatsoever. Any correspondence sent to these email addresses will not be read or acted upon in any way and will be deleted.

Correspondence which would normally be sent to Caxton House may, for the duration of the current emergency only, be emailed to [legal.queries@dpw.gov.uk](mailto:legal.queries@dpw.gov.uk).

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1. 18 March 2021

Additional information added to include "These email addresses are not

to be used for any correspondence whatsoever. Any correspondence sent to these email addresses will not be read or acted upon in any way and will be deleted.”

2. 2 April 2020

Added section on Home Office immigration tribunals

3. 30 March 2020

Updated immigration email address and removed HO postal address

4. 27 March 2020

Added details of DWP litigation

5. 27 March 2020

First published.

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## [Coronavirus – guidance on accessing green spaces safely](#)

This guidance sets out the key principles of enjoying the benefits of being outside, while protecting yourself and others from coronavirus.

The risk of the coronavirus being passed on to others outdoors is considered to be low as long as [people maintain social distancing](#).

In England you can leave your home to exercise and spend time outdoors for recreation with your household or in groups of up to six people from outside your household.

When travelling to outdoor spaces, it is important that people respect the rules in [Scotland](#), [Wales](#) and Northern Ireland. Do not travel to different parts of the UK where it would be inconsistent with guidance or regulations issued by the relevant devolved administration.

In England, you can now:

- spend time outdoors, including exercise, as long as you continue to adhere to strict social distancing guidelines with people from outside your household
- take part in other outdoor sports and activities, including fishing, in groups of up to six people, or household groups, provided you adhere to strict social distancing guidelines

- drive to outdoor open spaces, including beaches and beauty spots, irrespective of distance – you should travel in a private vehicle, alone or with members of your own household. You should avoid public transport other than for essential journeys.
- visit gardens, nature reserves and parkland to spend time outdoors, although access may be limited to members or those with tickets to ensure social distancing and buildings and amenities such as cafes will remain closed. You should check ahead and follow social distancing guidelines.
- go swimming in either lakes or the sea for exercise or recreation provided that social distancing guidelines are observed – you cannot use public indoor and outdoor swimming pools
- take part in all forms of water sports practised on open waterways, including sailing, windsurfing, canoeing, rowing, kayaking, surfing, paddle-boarding and the use of privately-owned motorised craft (in line with the guidance issued by the relevant navigation authority)
- you can continue to use towpaths for walking, running and cycling, being mindful of other users and people living in boats along the water

There are no restrictions on how far you can travel to get to the countryside. However you can not stay overnight. Campsites and caravan parks are closed and you cannot stay in a holiday or second home.

To stay safe, you must:

- take hygiene precautions when you are outside
- wash your hands as soon as you are back indoors
- keep at least two metres apart from anyone outside your household at all times
- take hand sanitiser with you when you set off in case there are no handwashing facilities

## **Respect other people and protect the natural environment**

Remember your actions can affect people's lives and livelihoods. Take the time to read signage. Respect the measures that local authorities and site management have put in place to help ensure social distancing.

Before travelling, you should check if facilities, such as car parks, are open to visitors. Do not park on verges or block gates. This restricts access for other vehicles.

When in the countryside, follow the [Countryside Code](#). You can do this by:

- leaving no trace of your visit and taking all of your litter home
- not using barbecues as they risk causing wildfires
- keeping dogs under effective control and on a lead when you are around farm animals – read further [guidance for pet owners](#)
- leaving gates as you find them and following instructions on signs
- keeping to footpaths and following signs where they suggest alternative

routes

Wildlife may have moved into areas where it hasn't previously been found, including nesting birds. Land managers may have taken action to provide extra protection of wildlife. Be vigilant and comply with these protective measures to ensure you do not disrupt the local wildlife.

## **Advice to land managers and landowners**

You will need to take account of [Working safely during COVID-19 in construction and other outdoor work](#).

You can also draw on the government's guidance for [Safer Public Places during Coronavirus](#). We recognise however that some of it is more relevant for urban areas and that different approaches may sometimes be required when managing access to land in the countryside.

It may not be practical to clean regularly all gates and stiles. You can display signs at access points reminding the public of the need to take hygiene precautions and wash hands regularly. Land managers may also wish to consider tying gates open if it is safe to do so, so that walkers do not need to touch the gate.

Landowners do not have the legal right to block or obstruct public rights of way or open access land. However, in circumstances where large numbers of people are using such routes, landowners may consider the following measures:

- temporarily displaying polite notices that encourage users to respect local residents and workers by following social distancing guidelines and consider using alternative routes that do not pass through gardens, farmyards or schools
- offering an alternative route around gardens and farmyards where it is safe to do so (you must gain permission from relevant landowners and make sure the route is safe for users and livestock) provided that the original right of way is maintained
- where footpaths are narrow and it is difficult as a result to abide by social distancing guidelines you may wish to consider putting up signage warning people

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## **Rules on carrying over annual leave to be relaxed to support key industries during COVID-19**

- Government to amend regulations to allow annual leave to be carried over into the next 2 years

- measures will ensure workers won't lose their leave entitlements
- move gives flexibility to business at a time when it is needed most

Workers who have not taken all of their statutory annual leave entitlement due to COVID-19 will now be able to carry it over into the next 2 leave years, under measures introduced by Business Secretary Alok Sharma today (Friday 27 March).

Currently, almost all workers are entitled to 28 days holiday including bank holidays each year. However, most of this entitlement cannot be carried between leave years, meaning workers lose their holiday if they do not take it.

There is also an obligation on employers to ensure their workers take their statutory entitlement in any one year – failure to do so could result in a financial penalty.

The regulations will allow up to 4 weeks of unused leave to be carried into the next 2 leave years, easing the requirements on business to ensure that workers take statutory amount of annual leave in any one year.

This will mean staff can continue working in the national effort against the coronavirus without losing out on annual leave entitlement.

The changes will also ensure all employers affected by COVID-19 have the flexibility to allow workers to carry over leave at a time when granting annual leave could leave them short-staffed in some of Britain's key industries, such as food and healthcare.

Business Secretary Alok Sharma said:

Whether it is in our hospitals, or our supermarkets, people are working around the clock to help our country deal with the coronavirus pandemic.

Today's changes will mean these valued employees do not lose out on the annual leave they are entitled to as a result of their efforts, and employers are not penalised.

Environment Secretary George Eustice said:

From our fields to our supermarkets, we are hugely grateful to the many people working around the clock to keep the nation fed.

At this crucial time, relaxing laws on statutory leave will help ensure key workers can continue the important work to keep supplies flowing, but without losing the crucial time off they are entitled to.

We welcome the measures the food industry is already taking to keep

shelves stocked and supply chains resilient, and will continue to support them with their response to coronavirus.

The changes will amend the Working Time Regulations, which apply to almost all workers, including agency workers, those who work irregular hours, and workers on zero-hours contracts.

The change is aimed at allowing businesses under particular pressure from the impacts of COVID-19 the flexibility to better manage their workforce, while protecting workers' right to paid holiday.

1. The Working Time Regulations 1998 convey a range of health and safety protections on workers, including daily and weekly rest breaks and paid statutory annual leave. Annual leave is granted by regulations 13 and 13A of the Working Time Regulations 1998, giving 4 weeks and 1.6 weeks of annual leave respectively.
2. The 4 weeks of annual leave granted by regulation 13 cannot generally be carried between leave years, with exceptions when a worker cannot take annual leave due to sickness or maternity leave. The 1.6 weeks of annual leave granted by regulation 13A can be carried forward one leave year (but no further) through an agreement between workers and their employers.
3. There is an obligation on an employer to ensure that their workers have an adequate opportunity to take their holiday. This holiday cannot be replaced with a payment in lieu unless the worker is leaving employment.
4. The Working Time (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 amends the Working Time Regulations 1998 to create a further exemption relating specifically to COVID-19. Where it is not reasonably practicable for a worker to take some, or all, of the holiday to which they are entitled due to the coronavirus, they have a right to carry the 4 weeks under regulation 13 into the next 2 leave years. This will not apply to the 1.6 weeks under regulation 13A leave, but this can be carried forward one year by agreement between workers and employers.
5. For the purposes of annual leave, a year is the leave year as agreed in writing between the worker and their employer, usually stipulated in a worker's contract. Although for some workers this will align with the calendar year (1 January to 31 December), it can be any year long period that is agreed upon.
6. All employers are subject to the Working Time Regulations 1998, and thus will be subject to the changes in the Working Time (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020.
7. All workers are subject to the Working Time Regulations 1998 unless they are subject to a different set of regulations. The Working Time Regulations 1998 do not apply to:

- workers covered by the Merchant Shipping (Hours of Work) Regulations 2002

- workers covered by the Fishing Vessels (Working Time: Sea-fishermen) Regulations 2004
- workers covered by the Merchant Shipping (Working Time: Inland Waterways) Regulations 2003

8. Furthermore, the regulations giving a right to paid annual leave do not apply to:

- where characteristics peculiar to certain specific services such as the armed forces, or to certain specific activities in the civil protection services conflict with the regulations
- workers covered by the Civil Aviation (Working Time) Regulations 2004
- the activities of workers who are doctors in training