

Community Action: Bedfordshire News update

March 2020

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Coronavirus Guidance for Volunteer-Involving Organisations, Staff and Volunteers

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has officially described Coronavirus (COVID-19) as a pandemic and the Government is stepping up its plans and measures to combat the infection in the UK. As countries, health systems, public health, businesses and the general public are being urged to 'activate and scale-up emergency response mechanisms', here are some simple steps we can take to help minimise the risk of our staff, volunteers and service users catching and spreading the Coronavirus.

What your organisation can do

- Put practical measures in place to help reduce the risk of spreading the virus such as providing anti-bacterial hand-wash, and highly visible signs reminding staff to wash hands and disinfect work areas.
- Share information with your staff and volunteers on how to reduce the risk of the infection: have a look at our [Coronavirus Guidance for Volunteer Involving Organisations, Staff and Volunteers](#), which you can adapt for your organisation (*Information sheet is also attached to this email*). It includes specific advice for volunteers undertaking visits to people's homes, driving or managing community buildings. Community Action has also produced a separate Information for members of Timebanks.
- Set an agreed meeting etiquette, for example avoid handshakes, in an effort to lower the risk of infection.
- Write a contingency plan: how would your organisation operate if your staff or volunteers are unable to provide your usual services due to office closure or illness? For ideas on what to include, have a look at [Zurich's Guidance on Pandemic Planning](#).

Public Health England advise that you take the following precautions. This is the same advice given for the avoidance of general colds and flu, and is good advice to follow at all times.

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when you cough or sneeze. See [Catch it, Bin it, Kill it](#)
- Put used tissues in the bin straight away
- Wash your hands with soap and water often – use hand sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available. See [hand washing guidance](#) and if you don't fancy singing *Happy Birthday* while washing your hands look for inspiration for other songs on this [tweet-thread of alternative options](#)
- Try to avoid close contact with people who are unwell.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces regularly (e.g. keyboards, phones and laptops) and avoid hotdesking if possible.

- Do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean.

If you think you are unwell

The most common symptoms of Coronavirus are the recent onset of:

- new continuous cough and/or
- high temperature

If you have symptoms of the Coronavirus infection, however mild, stay at home and do not leave your house for seven days from when your symptoms started.

Follow Public Health England's advice on [self isolation](#). If your symptoms worsen during home isolation or you are no better after seven days you should use the NHS 111 online tool to find out what to do next. You can keep up to date with the Government's [advice on Coronavirus](#), which may change from day to day. If you have no internet access, you should call NHS 111. For a medical emergency dial 999.

Reducing risk of exposure

Generally, these infections can cause more severe symptoms in people with weakened immune systems, such as older people and those with long-term conditions like diabetes, cancer and chronic lung disease. While you may not fall into one of these groups, your colleagues and those they are close to could be severely affected if exposed to the virus. Please be vigilant and isolate yourself if there is a risk you have been exposed to the virus.

Get up to date with Public Health England's latest advice for social or community care environments, including guidance on face masks and what to do if an employee becomes unwell – read more [here](#).

NCVO: Your organisation and Coronavirus

Follow [NCVO](#), which is working alongside the NHS and the Health and Wellbeing Alliance on how to support the most vulnerable in our communities, to keep updated with the latest developments. Their current guidance covers the following:

- What's the best way to prevent the spread of the virus?
- What do we need to do to protect staff, volunteers and visitors?
- Should our employees take sick leave?
- Should we cancel our events?
- How do we support our beneficiaries/service users?
- How do we support members of communities facing discrimination?
- How will we develop a contingency plan and how will our insurance be impacted?
- Will there be financial implications?
- How will our investments be impacted?
- How are charities helping?

[Click here to view NCVO guidance in full – the website will be updated regularly](#)

Bedfordshire Local Emergency Volunteers Executive Committee (BLEVEC)

Robert Labe from BLEVEC is representing the voluntary and community sector at contingency planning meetings being held by the Bedfordshire Local Resilience Forum (BLRF). BLEVEC is keen to ensure that any concerns or issues from volunteer-involving organisations are highlighted and fed into the ongoing planning and response to Coronavirus.

If the impact of Coronavirus on your organisation has a serious consequence in terms of caring for vulnerable people or children, the homeless, food banks or those in crisis, then BLEVEC would like to hear about this so it can be fed into the contingency planning and resources assessed to respond to areas of need. Please do contact Robert by email - robertlabe@talk21.com if you feel there are issues that need to be taken account of.

What to expect next?

Government guidelines are changing hourly and further restrictions are likely.

If you have the capability, staff and volunteers may be able to work from home. There are some interesting tips on working from home for charity workers [here](#).

While information is continuing to change, it is important to keep your staff and volunteers informed. Keep an eye on our social media posts and website but bear in mind **advice is changing every day**.

Follow us @CABedfordshire on Twitter and Facebook or visit our website www.cabeds.org.uk

Additional information

To keep up to date with the latest developments, see NCVO's list of useful websites below:

Key up-to-date information from the government

- [GOV.UK latest information and advice](#)
- [NHS Overview of coronavirus advice](#)

Sector-specific guidance

- [UK: Guidance for social or community care and residential settings on COVID-19](#)
- [UK: COVID-19 guidance for educational settings](#)
- [NHS England: Coronavirus information for clinicians](#)

Risk management

- [Charity Commission Guidance on charities and risk management](#)
- [Zurich: Organisational resilience guidance on pandemic planning](#)
- [Charities Facilities Management Group: Business continuity for charities](#)

Travel advice

- [UK: COVID-19 travel advice](#)

Local Authorities

- [Central Bedfordshire Council](#)
- [Luton Council](#)
- [Bedford Borough Council](#)

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