

COVID-19 Local Business Briefing

13th March 2020

The below notes were made from a briefing to local businesses on COVID-19. The briefing was delivered by Southwark Council's Emergency Planning and Public Health departments, and the information is correct at the time of writing (13th March).

Background

- COVID-19 is one of a variety of coronavirus diseases that affect the respiratory system. The high infection rate is a result of its 'novelty' and as such there is no natural immunity (yet). In this respect it is different from the common influenza virus.
- Symptoms are a cough and/or fever, and they usually develop in 2-4 days.
- For most people it will be a mild infection.
- There appears to be immunity lasting at least 6 months for those who recover. There is not yet enough data to say whether the immunity lasts longer than 6 months.

Change from 'Contain' to 'Delay'

- The disease has now moved into a widespread community transmission phase and as a result the government's response yesterday moved from 'contain' to 'delay'.
- Delaying the spread allows the health service to be able to cope with the rising number of cases; provides time to develop a vaccine; and shifts the peak number of cases towards the summer when the warmer weather slows transmission.
- Widespread testing and contact tracing (as done in the 'contain' phase) will soon cease because the large number of cases now makes this impractical, it's a drain on healthcare resources and the majority of patients don't require clinical intervention.
- However, hospital admissions will still be tested.

What To Do

- If somebody has a cough and/or fever they should self-isolate for 7 days, as should the rest of their household as a preventative measure.
- Advice from the NHS on self-isolation is [available here](#).
- The threshold for these symptoms should be low; it's best to be cautious.
- Those with symptoms should not notify the health service (e.g. visiting a GP or calling 111) as there is no clinical intervention to be made.
- However, they should seek medical advice (via 111 or 999) if symptoms persist for more than 7 days or they become severe.
- Employers who have staff self-isolating at home should send a communication to all employees along the lines of: "A member of staff is exhibiting symptoms indicative of COVID-19 so is self-isolating at home. Please be vigilant for symptoms of a cough and/or fever."
- From a staff welfare perspective, maintain regular contact with those self-isolating as it can be lonely and stressful.
- Cleaning:
 - An enhanced cleaning regime but using normal products and practices will suffice.
 - There is no need for specialist services advertised as 'deep cleans' - this is not a valid term.
 - Pay particular attention to common surfaces such as door handles.
 - Hot-desks (and their equipment such as phones & keyboards) used by multiple staff should be cleaned between users.
 - Maintain good hand hygiene.
- Hotels should follow the advice being given by the government to residential care homes [available here](#).
- Communicate your company policies clearly to staff and make them aware of the symptoms to watch for.

Business Continuity

- This will be a marathon not a sprint. The number of cases will continue to increase over the next 3-4 weeks and peak in approximately 8 weeks' time. Disruption lasting at least 3 months should therefore be anticipated.
- Directing all staff to work from home, even those who are healthy and not self-isolating, is a decision entirely down to each individual organisation. Bear in mind the likely prolonged nature of this pandemic.
- Identify your key functions – prioritise what must be delivered, what resources are needed and what can be delayed/cut down.
- Consider re-training staff so they're able to cover other roles should the need arise.

- Ensure you have an up-to-date list of staff contact details.
- Check the resilience and business continuity plans of your supply chain.
- Beware of fraudsters attempting to sell unnecessary products and services.
- Don't panic buy – there is no shortage of food, cleaning and medical products but panic buying in bulk causes short-term supply issues for all.

Useful Links

NHS information – the first port of call for the public:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

Latest information and advice:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-information-for-the-public>

FAQs

<https://publichealthmatters.blog.gov.uk/2020/01/23/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-what-you-need-to-know/>

Blog about contact tracing:

<https://publichealthmatters.blog.gov.uk/2020/02/13/expert-interview-what-is-contact-tracing/>

Blog about self-isolation:

<https://publichealthmatters.blog.gov.uk/2020/02/20/what-is-self-isolation-and-why-is-it-important/>

Blog about the five things you can do to protect yourself and your community:

<https://publichealthmatters.blog.gov.uk/2020/03/04/coronavirus-covid-19-5-things-you-can-do-to-protect-yourself-and-your-community/>

Coronavirus (COVID-19): What is social distancing?

<https://publichealthmatters.blog.gov.uk/2020/03/04/coronavirus-covid-19-what-is-social-distancing/>

Travel advice for those travelling and living overseas:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-advice-novel-coronavirus>

Advice for hotels and social care premises

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-social-or-community-care-and-residential-settings-on-covid-19>

Southwark Council's Website

<https://www.southwark.gov.uk/health-and-wellbeing/public-health/for-the-public/coronavirus>