



From the Deputy National Welfare Advisor

Dear Area/Branch Secretaries, Welfare Officers and Shipmates

CORONAVIRUS (COVID 19) – ARE THINGS GETTING BETTER?

I hope all shipmates are well and, if not, are making a good recovery. The welcome phased easing of lockdown restrictions is part of government plans to return life to as near normal as they can be, for as many people as they can, as quickly and fairly as possible in order to safeguard livelihoods in a safe way that continues to protect the NHS.

Government guidance and plans continue to evolve, hence delay to this briefing. Within the UK they are moving at different rates in the devolved administrations appropriate to their situation. This briefing is current as of 29th June and I hope it helps but do watch the news and websites for further changes as guidance evolves to meet changing situations.

Shipmate General Secretary, Bill Oliphant, has addressed separately the challenges, sadness and encouragement experienced by us all in the wake of the Covid 19 pandemic. The good news is how at all levels, the RNA family has maintained comradeship through direct support and virtual contact in all its forms. Shipmates, individually and in their branches across the country have worked together to overcome social isolation and enforced social distancing. Well done all.

Are things getting better? The latest briefings and ONS published statistics are all generally moving the right way with continued significant decreases in deaths to low levels, R (infection rate) and infections but recoveries increasing. There are localised hot spots and spikes but, overall, it looks promising as evidenced by the government downgrading the Covid Alert level from Alert level 4 (Transmission is high or rising exponentially and social distancing continues) to Alert level 3 (Virus is in general circulation and gradual relaxing of restrictions). However, Covid 19 is still out there shipmates and we all need to maintain social distancing and observe the guidance in each of the devolved administrations to keep it under control. This briefing largely addresses changes in England Coronavirus guidance, but details of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales can be found on their respective websites as listed below.

What do we have to do still? In England much of the guidance remains the same and we can all help control the virus if we all stay alert.

- Stay at home as much as possible except for a limited set of reasons and in line with scientific advice most of us can take part in extended outdoor activity, travel and exercise.
- Work from home if you can.
- Limit contact with other people by maintaining social distancing (2 metres apart recommended where possible but reducing to 1 metre plus); do not gather in groups of more than six from different households and choose your support bubble with one other household if you live alone or are a single parent with dependent children.
- Wash your hands and face regularly.
- Do not leave home if you or anyone in your household has symptoms but self-isolate.

So, what has changed? The good news has been the further relaxation of restrictions in England with Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales introducing their changes at a pace appropriate to their circumstances. Non-essential shops have or are in process of re-opening; groups of up to 6 from different households are already allowed to meet outdoors subject to social distancing. From Saturday 4th July, two households will be able to meet up in any setting with social distancing



measures, friends and families will be able to meet up together and stay overnight whilst people will be able to enjoy staycations in England with the reopening of accommodation sites.

What else has changed? In summary from Saturday July 4th clubs, pubs, restaurants will be able to reopen, providing they adhere to COVID Secure guidelines such as maximum groups of 6 to protect customers and separation of entry and exit points so socialising together will be possible. With the re-opening of hairdressers from the same date your hair will be back to normal too! Some leisure facilities and tourist attractions may also reopen (if they can do so safely) whilst “close proximity” venues for example nightclubs, indoor gyms, swimming pools remain closed for now to reduce the risk of transmission. Social distancing will reduce from 2m to “1m plus” where 2m is not practicable together with other measures all reducing the risk of transmission.

What really can I and can't I do then? FAQs summarising what you can and can't do after 4th July are at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do-after-4-july>. This covers a wide range of questions and is well worth a look as it makes clear the advice and guidance elsewhere.

What you can do is:

- Meet in groups of up to two households (your [support bubble](#) counts as one household) in any location - public or private, indoors or outdoors.
- Form a ‘support bubble’ with one other household and a single adult household (adults who live alone or with dependent children only) and spend time together inside each other’s homes, including overnight, without needing to stay 2 meters apart. This change supports the loneliest and most isolated.
- Meet with different households at different times. **However, remember even inside someone’s home, you should socially distance from anyone not in your household or bubble.** The support received from carers is not affected by this change.
- When outside you can continue to meet in groups of up to six people from different households, following social distancing guidelines
- Go to additional businesses and venues, including restaurants, pubs, hairdressers’ cinemas, visitor attractions, hotels, and campsites but certain premises remain closed where the risks of transmission may be higher eg gyms
- Visit other public places, such as libraries, community centres, places of worship, outdoor playgrounds and outdoor gyms where open
- Stay overnight away from your home with your own household or support bubble, or with members of one other household

What you cannot do is:

- Get together indoors in groups of more than two households (your support bubble counts as one household) even when dining out or going to the pub
- Get together outdoors in a group of more than six people from different households; gatherings larger than 6 should only take place if everyone is from just two households
- Interact socially with anyone outside the group you are attending a place with, even if you see other people you know eg in an RNA Club, restaurant, community centre or place of worship
- Hold or attend celebrations (such as parties) where it is difficult to maintain social distancing
- Stay overnight away from your home with members of more than one other household (your support bubble counts as one household)

How can I protect myself? The government publishes detailed and updated guidance on staying safe outside your home (see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-safe->



[outside-your-home](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing)) and social distancing rules (see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing>). The simplest way to protect yourself is to maintain social distancing and follow the guidance. When socialising or shopping check that your venue is Covid Secure ie it has put in place the necessary precautions to protect you and others.

What about shielding for clinically vulnerable or extremely vulnerable shipmates? All clinically vulnerable shipmates received letters and/or text continuing the need for their shielding so they have been staying in and accessing home delivery or other support systems until the end of June. The government in England has updated its guidance for people who are shielding taking into account that COVID-19 disease levels have decreased over the last few weeks. Although clinically vulnerable shipmates need to continue to take precautions, with effect from 6 July they can meet with 6 others outdoors and those alone and/or with dependent children can form a support bubble with one other household.

In addition, those advised as clinically extremely vulnerable have been advised they can stop shielding from 1 August. This is an individual decision though and some medical authorities suggest shielding should continue in certain conditions. Perhaps best to consult your lead clinician before making any decision. The guidance will be kept under regular review and details are published at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>. However, all of us in RNA need to remember these shipmates particularly as they've faced real social isolation before and during Covid 19. The various branch contact and support schemes need, as a priority, to continue to support and include these shipmates.

What's happened to Test and Trace? The NHS Coronavirus mobile app developed by NHS Technology has serious operational flaws, so the NHS and government are moving as quickly as possible to adopt the Apple and Google based platform being used in the EU. Fortunately, this was being developed in parallel as a backup. The aims of the Test and Trace service supported by guidance requiring hospitality and hairdressers to record visitors contact details are to allow the NHS to:

- Trace the spread of the virus and isolate new infections.
- Ensure early access to testing after exposure
- Play a vital role in giving early warning if the virus is increasing locally or nationally again
- Help to ensure that anyone who develops symptoms of coronavirus can be tested quickly to find out if they have the virus.
- Help trace close recent contacts of anyone who tests positive for coronavirus and, if necessary, notify them by text that they must self-isolate at home to help stop the spread of the virus.

How do I get tested for coronavirus? The government's focus remains on providing tests for those with symptoms in hospital, essential workers and care homes but did recently extend this to the wider public with Coronavirus symptoms. However, priority is still given to people in hospital and essential workers, including NHS and social care staff so it all depends on capacity whether you get a test. Capacity has been an issue, but the rollout of testing is increasing and will extend further to help control the virus by finding out where it is. The antigen test checks if you have the virus and there is another test (antibody test) that checks if you have already had the virus. However, the latter test is not widely available yet.

You need to have the test in the first 5 days of having symptoms but it's recommended that you ask for the test in the first 3 days, as it may take a day or two to arrange. In England, Scotland and



Northern Ireland you can ask for a test for yourself if you have coronavirus symptoms **now** or for someone you live with if they have coronavirus symptoms at <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-for-coronavirus/ask-for-a-test-to-check-if-you-have-coronavirus/>. Shipmates in Wales will need to ask online for a home test kit or make a drive-through appointment online for regional test sites in Wales (<https://gov.wales/apply-coronavirus-test>)

Will a face covering or mask help protect me? Current rules state that you must wear a face covering at all times on public transport or when attending a hospital as a visitor or outpatient. It's suggested you also wear a face covering in other enclosed public spaces where social distancing isn't possible and where you will come into contact with people you do not normally meet. Remember evidence suggests that wearing a face covering does **not** protect you. Face coverings do **not** replace social distancing. However, if you are infected but have not yet developed symptoms, it may provide some protection for others you come into close contact with. You can make face coverings at home (see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-wear-and-make-a-cloth-face-covering>) which should cover the mouth and nose.

The above guidance quoted applies in England – people in [Scotland](#), [Wales](#) and [Northern Ireland](#) should check follow the specific rules in those parts of the UK. The essential messages are similar but, as in England, some have changed and been relaxed (or not) so do watch your local news and briefings or look at the updated guidance's for Scotland (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-individuals-and-businesses-in-scotland>), Northern Ireland (<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/coronavirus-covid-19>) or Wales (<https://gov.wales/coronavirus>).

Want to avoid being scammed? The recent briefing from shipmate Karl Webb took the form of comprehensive and detailed advice on protecting yourself when on e-media in all its forms and from scammers (see <https://royal-naval-association.co.uk/news/covid-19-advice-and-support-guide-cyber-security/>). Cybersecurity is important to protect your identity and your money so it's well worth a read. These fraudsters have not stopped their attacks and some recent things to look out for are:

- **Test & Trace scams** – Sadly, scammers are trying to get people to give up personal information so they can try to hack into your bank accounts by number spoofing. This is done through false apps, emails, calls and texts claiming you have been in contact with a Covid-19 carrier and asking you to click on a link or call a number. They then often ask for a fee for a kit using your bank details. Do not respond. Any real NHS contacts should never for personal details upfront.
- **Purchase scams** – These are straightforward false selling sites or ads such as on social media offering goods that do not exist. Check any sites and offers out carefully before you part with any money.
- **Payment scams** – These consist of false emails or texts claiming to be from the government and offering government grants via false government gateway sites or demanding money for you breaking lockdown rules. Both ask for personal details such as email and password. Care and checking needed here before any response.
- **Work from home scams** – These fraudsters call pretending to be your HR department and offering a tax rebate for home working however they are after personal information to support fraud from your bank account. How do they know where you work? Amazing what social media platforms such as Twitter or LinkedIn give to them!
- **Online freebies** – Facebook and Twitter platforms are used to offer promotions and surveys in exchange for your personal information which then is used to attempt to hack into your bank account. Beware of such freebies.

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As you can see, they're all very inventive and can be costly to your financial welfare so the best advice is, if it looks too good to be true then it isn't true and, if in any doubt, don't respond or click on the link. Check it out by other means before parting with your money.

So, are things getting better and is this the beginning of the end for Covid 19? Yes, they are getting better, I believe, but we need to stay alert to control the virus and save lives. Sadly, I think it is not the beginning of the end but to quote Churchill "Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is perhaps the end of the beginning." I hope that all the good things that we in the RNA family have done together to support each other as shipmates will continue after Covid 19 is beaten.

Please distribute this widely, keep following government public health guidelines and look after your shipmates by phone, text, e-media or letter.

Stay Alert, Control the Virus and Save Lives

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