



## From the Deputy National Welfare Advisor

Dear Area/Branch Secretaries, Welfare Officers and Shipmates

### **CORONAVIRUS (COVID 19) – AND STAY ALERT REALLY MEANS?**

Ahoy shipmates

**Are you alert shipmates? Did you understand the recent messages given out by the PM and government in their briefings? Do you know if you are in lockdown or not?** Hopefully this briefing will help. Let's start with the devolved governments of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales as they're simpler to explain. The essential message is Standfast in the ranks, no change in lockdown or specific rules as these continue with some tinkering (see additional guidance) even to the extent of no change in the primary message of Stay at Home. This may change so do watch your local news and briefings or look at guidance 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>) and Wales (<https://gov.wales/coronavirus>)

For England it is a little less clear but read on. The PM and subsequent briefings offered, as a personal opinion, somewhat mixed messages for England with a new motto of Stay Alert, Control the Virus and Save Lives. What does all that mean in reality? All the details, and there are many, are at <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>. I have focussed on some key areas and questions but it's well worth looking at the English website Guidance and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) as they are helpful and detailed.

**What does Stay Alert mean? In reality it's no change here as** the website says that means you must:

- stay at home as much as possible except for a limited set of reasons but the good news in line with scientific advice is most of us can take part in much more outdoor activity and exercise
- work from home if you can
- limit contact with other people by maintaining social distancing (2 metres apart where possible); do not gather in groups of more than two, except with members of your household or for other specific exceptions set out in law
- wash your hands regularly
- Do not leave home if you or anyone in your household has symptoms

**What does Control the Virus mean?** This means following the good guidance out there, being socially responsible to yourself and others and doing the right things. It's that simple! It also means supporting measures such as tracing contacts for Covid 19 through the new mobile NHS Contact app described in a previous briefing. This remains in trial in the Isle of Wight with 65000 of 80000 signed up to it at the time of writing. It is not available on the mainland as yet and there remains debate on whether we will adopt this one or that developed by Apple and Google which is being used in the EU.

**Save Lives?** This is self-evident. You only have to reflect on the sad statistics of 35000 deaths so far and the many tragic stories of all ages struck down to realise that containing the virus by simple actions will help limit that toll. To put it into perspective though and look for some positives, the death rate is markedly decreasing now, R (infection rate) is down and against the 5 million who are estimated to have had it, it could have been worse. Unfortunately, there are no reliable statistics for those recovered as yet but government has asked for publication of these. What we



do need to remember though is it could come back as a surge if some of us do not follow guidance.

**What can I do and can't do then?** All the details 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>. This covers a wide range of questions and is well worth a look as it makes clear the advice and guidance elsewhere.

**How can I stay safe?** The "Staying Safe Outside the Home" guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-safe-outside-your-home/staying-safe-outside-your-home>) sets out eleven principles to follow to make sure that time spent with others outside your home is as safe as possible.

- Keep your distance from people outside your household
- Keep your hands and face as clean as possible
- Work from home if you can
- Avoid being face-to-face with people if they are outside your household
- Reduce the number of people you spend time with in a work setting
- Avoid crowds
- If you have to travel (for example, to work or school), think about how and when you travel
- Wash your clothes regularly
- Keep indoor places well ventilated
- Face coverings – use appropriately
- When at work, follow the advice given to you by your employer

**What about clinically vulnerable or extremely vulnerable shipmates?** No change here either! All shipmates in these groups should have received a letter and/or text continuing the need for their shielding so will be staying in and accessing home delivery and other support systems. We in RNA need to remember these shipmates as their social isolation will be further increased. The various branch contact schemes need, as a priority, to include these shipmates.

**Can I get tested?** The government has focused on providing tests for those with symptoms in hospital, essential workers and care homes but recently has extended this to the wider public with Coronavirus symptoms (see above). 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. The rollout of testing is increasing and will extend further to assist controlling 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've already had the virus. However, the latter test is not 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>)

**Where can I get support in England?** Apart from the previous advice and guidance on support from your branch, RNA, the naval family and other agencies, there are details of many areas of guidance and support at <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>.



**What about the NHS and my non-emergency treatments?** The NHS is still there for you for coronavirus and continues its many other health services. Hospitals have adapted to the new circumstances by measures such as offering telephone consultations and segregation of Covid 19 and non-Covid areas. Regrettably some non-urgent treatment has had to be deferred but you will have been advised directly of that. The NHS will work hard to catch up when things ease but please do not put off seeking urgent medical advice if unwell.

**What about NHS advice and Covid 19?** This has not changed and remains as **Do not leave home** if you or someone you live with has any of the following:

- a high temperature (hot to touch on your chest or back but you do not need to measure your temperature)
- a new, continuous cough (coughing a lot for more than an hour, or 3 or more coughing episodes in 24 hours)
- a loss of, or change to, your sense of smell or taste (unable to smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste different to normal **NOTE Newly added as a symptom**)
- if you have symptoms check the NHS website <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/check-if-you-have-coronavirus-symptoms/>

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

Stay Alert, Control the Virus and Save Lives (aka Stay at Home for non-English shipmates),

*Geoff Apperley*