



From the General Secretary

29 June 2020

Dear Shipmate Branch Chairmen and Secretaries,

CORONAVIRUS (COVID 19) UPDATE

It has been a long time since the introduction of lockdown restrictions on 23 March 2020 dramatically changed all our lives. Covid 19 has brought challenges, sadness and encouragement to us all. Challenges in coping, sadness in the loss of shipmates and loved ones but a huge encouragement in how we, as shipmates, individually and in our branches across the country have worked together to overcome social isolation and enforced social distancing. It has been great for me to receive reports of how, at all levels, RNA comradeship has been maintained through direct support and virtual contact in all its forms. BZs all round.

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. In England the recent review will reduce social distancing from Saturday 4th July from 2m to “1m plus” where 2m is not practicable, together with other measures reducing the risk of transmission.

Can I socialise? Things are moving at a pace now and at a different rate in each of the UK's nations. Please therefore check what is appropriate for you. In England, groups of up to 6 from different households have already been able 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. From the same date clubs, pubs, restaurants and hairdressers will be able to reopen, providing they adhere to COVID Secure guidelines such as maximum groups of 6 to protect customers; so socialising together will be possible and your hair will be back to normal! 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.

Should our Branch/Club re-convene? A few years ago the RNA changed the name of the national co-ordinating function from HQ to Central Office in recognition that it has no Command function; instead Central Office merely runs the Association in accordance with the Articles established in the Royal Charter with Rules and By-laws approved by Conference. For this reason, it is not for Central Office to dictate when Branches or Clubs should re-convene, however, **we would very strongly advise that, as an absolute minimum, you continue to follow the letter of the law.** In addition, when you do decide to re-convene, Branch Committees do so having conducted a full risk assessment, taking the utmost care to protect shipmates, noting that much of our demographic lies in the “at risk” category.

While it is written in the Objects of our Association that we should “bring members together” clearly these are special circumstances and we wouldn't wish to be seen to be encouraging that if it is going to stand shipmates into danger. A chance to enjoy time together again in the right Covid Secure setting with your shipmates and friends will be very welcome but.... just be sensible!

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What about shielding? As things improve, many shielding shipmates remain isolated due to clinical vulnerability because of existing medical conditions. That will change from 6 July with government guidance allowing them to mix in groups of 6 outside and, if single, from a support bubble with another household of any size. There have been concerns expressed by some medical groups that shielding should continue and so it will be a matter for individual decision. The likely reality is that many of these shipmates will choose to continue strictly shielding to protect themselves and so their isolation will continue. We must not forget these shipmates and we must continue to support them.

Where can I find out more? Details set out as FAQs on what you can and can't do after 4 July are at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-outbreak-fags-what-you-can-and-cant-do/coronavirus-outbreak-fags-what-you-can-and-cant-do-after-4-july>. Worth a read to find out more.

These very welcome changes are a measured response to a drop in numbers of those with coronavirus from 1 in 400 a month ago to fewer than 1 in 1700 now with other markers such as deaths, infection rates and hospital admissions all significantly down and moving in the right direction. This is all good news. **However please remember shipmates, Covid 19 has not been beaten yet, it is still out there.** There are still cases occurring and significant numbers in hospital or ill and in isolation. A vaccine remains some way off. As a duty of care, we all need to observe the new advice and continue to follow social distancing and the guidelines to keep coronavirus under control. We have a responsibility to ourselves, our shipmates and the communities in which we live to sustain the phased return towards normality.

Best wishes to all shipmates and branches from all in the Central Office team. Stay safe and keep following the guidelines, look after yourselves and your shipmates by phone, text, email or e-media.

As ever,

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