

COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Briefing (last updated: 24 March 2020)

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Introduction and background

Please tell us about any COVID-19 impacts you are experiencing via influencing@adviceuk.org.uk – as we talk to funders and other stakeholders, it is important for us to know what is happening on the ground and what you need.

We encourage you to follow official guidance from trusted sources, and to counter misinformation. Please provide feedback on omissions, inaccuracies, or items for inclusion in any future versions of this briefing. Do also share any resources or approaches you have found helpful: we'll be sharing these on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

The purpose of this briefing is to help AdviceUK members consider, manage and respond to the impacts of COVID-19 on their organisations and the individuals and communities they advise and support. AdviceUK members, together with other civil society organisations, are playing a vital role in helping people navigate this public health emergency. This is a rapidly-changing situation, and it is likely that things will continue to change at short notice. This briefing was last updated on 24 March 2020.

Given the wide range of potential impacts, we have assumed that AdviceUK members will particularly need to consider the impacts of COVID-19 in relation to:

- Advice and support given through face-to-face channels, directly impacted by social distancing measures.
- Advice and support given to people whose health status means that they are more vulnerable to the impacts of COVID-19, for example, those with respiratory conditions or weakened immune systems.
- Advice and support given to people facing social welfare problems, whose circumstances or experiences mean that they are particularly exposed to the impacts of disruption associated with COVID-19, for example, poor housing or no housing, loss of income from precarious/self-employed work/sector-specific redundancies/reduced hours, and pre-existing problem debt.
- Impacts on your organisation's workforce, operations and income streams.
- Demand for advice on housing and homelessness issues.
- Demand for advice from people experiencing abuse, for example domestic abuse.
- Demand for advice on social welfare care and health issues.
- Demand for advice arising from relationship breakdown.
- Demand for advice on education issues, particularly those with special educational needs (SEN).
- Demand for advice on immigration and consumer issues.
- Demand for advice on discrimination issues.

Key sources of information (you should read these first)

- NHS: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/> is a key source of information.
- UK Government: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus> is a key source of information, as is <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19>
- Your local authority: sign up for their updates about COVID-19.
- NCVO's helpful guidance at <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/practical-support/information/coronavirus>
- <https://www.adviceuk.org.uk/member-services/members-area/> for our briefing and links to Croner HR advice line and toolkit.
- This from Bates Wells <https://bateswells.co.uk/campaigns/coronavirus/> (helpful on issues such as charity governance)
- World Health Organisation's guidance at <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>
- Information in other languages: <https://www.doctorsoftheworld.org.uk/news/coronavirus-information/>

Managing, monitoring, understanding and reporting on COVID-19 impacts

AdviceUK encourages you to monitor COVID-19 impacts on your organisation and advice services. Tell us via influencing@adviceuk.org.uk about significant impacts that you are experiencing so we can represent your needs effectively. Actions to take:

- Consider how you can continue to advise people as additional social distancing measures are introduced: act on current guidance.
- Prepare or upgrade your organisation's ICT infrastructure: voicemail; website; online collaboration and conferencing; mobiles for staff working from home.
- CIPD and ACAS have useful guidance on HR considerations, including working from home: <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/emp-law/health-safety/coronavirus-factsheet> and <https://www.acas.org.uk/coronavirus>
- Opportunities to work collaboratively with other stakeholders: organisations should focus first on creating infrastructure for communication, decision making, and collaborative action, and understanding what external partners are doing. If you are involved in an advice forum or network, check that it is linked in to other stakeholder initiatives and planning: local authority; civil society (for example the local CVS, see <https://navca.org.uk/>; and local foodbank networks, see for example <https://www.trusselltrust.org/>).

- Signposting to advice and support provided by other partners locally.
- Options for how your organisation can respond to changing demand for practical support, information and advice in the event of adverse economic impacts or disruption. These could include price rises, shortages, local employers laying people off, or increased pressure on public services.
- Arrangements to monitor COVID-19-related impacts (for example using [AdvicePro](#) to capture information on demand and identified needs).
- Asking clients, or particular groups of clients, about their experiences.
- Providing information, training and guidance on recommended hygiene and social distancing measures.

Coronavirus support for benefit claimants

Daily updates and links to benefit regulations: <https://www.rightsnet.org.uk/covid19>
See also <https://www.rightsnet.org.uk/forums/viewforum/42/>

<https://www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk/coronavirus/> for specifics on Universal Credit.

Sign up for DWP's Touchbase:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/touchbase-dwp-news-about-work-working-age-benefits-and-services>

Face-to-face assessments: claimants on disability benefits will no longer be required to attend face-to-face assessments. The change also covers health checks for Universal Credit, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/face-to-face-health-assessments-for-benefits-suspended-amid-coronavirus-outbreak>

Coronavirus support for employees

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-guidance-for-employees>

Coronavirus support for businesses

A range of extra support and measures are being put in place to help organisations affected by coronavirus, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-support-for-businesses>

People with underlying health conditions or requiring health care for other reasons

<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>

Pregnancy and maternity

Maternity Action <https://maternityaction.org.uk/> has useful COVID-19 resources and is hosting special webinars on rights at work and benefits for pregnant women and their families. To participate, e-mail with your contact details, organisation and job title to webinars@maternityaction.org.uk

Treatment for addiction and/or substance misuse

See <https://www.collectivevoice.org.uk/blog/treatment-and-recovery-services-and-covid-19/>

Mental health

See <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/>

People facing social welfare problems, whose circumstances or experiences make them vulnerable to the impacts of COVID-19 disruption

Shocks to household income

If you don't provide debt advice yourself, consider being able to signpost or refer people to services. Find AdviceUK members, Law Centres and local Citizens Advice who can undertake debt advice and casework locally. Connect people with organisations that are authorised by the FCA to give debt advice on a not-for-profit basis. The following networks of debt advice providers may also be of interest:

Money Advice West <https://www.moneyadvicewest.org.uk/>; EMMA

<https://emma.uk.net/services/>; and Debt Free London

<https://www.debtfree.london/>. Organisations like National Debtline

<https://www.nationaldebtline.org/> and Business Debtline

<https://www.businessdebtline.org/> may also be able to help.

Housing and homelessness

See https://england.shelter.org.uk/housing_advice/coronavirus and <http://www.homeless.org.uk/covid19-resources> such as

<https://www.homeless.org.uk/connect/blogs/2020/mar/05/covid-19-coronavirus-outbreak>

Employment

See <https://www.danielbarnett.co.uk/site/mailling-list/mailling-list-signup/> for regular, in-depth updates.

Fuel poverty

See <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-agrees-measures-with-energy-industry-to-support-vulnerable-people-through-covid-19>

Guidance and updates from regulators, funders and justice system

Financial Conduct Authority

Please give any feedback on coronavirus impact on your FCA-regulated work to ConsumerInsight@fca.org.uk (please make sure to copy in influencing@adviceuk.org.uk). The FCA has given specific information for different types of FCA-regulated firms at <https://www.fca.org.uk/firms/information-firms-coronavirus-covid-19-response> and some updates about delays to its workplans over the coming months.

Funders

See <http://covid19funders.org.uk/> for a large group of funders that are seeking to coordinate their response to COVID-19. Check here if you are concerned about current funding, http://covid19funders.org.uk/news_updates/ has details about funding that is becoming available.

Justice system and courts

See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-courts-and-tribunals-planning-and-preparation>

Social distancing and face-to-face advice

Follow the guidance that is currently in force (at the time of writing the key message is **to stay at home**). Plan for social distancing measures to be heightened further and to be in force over the longer term. Pay particular attention to measures to protect people who are 70 or over, have a long-term condition, are pregnant, or have a weakened immune system. Seek to establish communication channels that can reduce or eliminate the need for people to undertake activity that contributes to

COVID-19 transmission: don't just consider the actual advice-giving interaction, also consider related activities.

Ensure you have correct contact details for clients with existing cases and agree how you will stay in touch. Don't forget options such as phone, text and post for those who may not have access to the internet or be confident in using a computer or smartphone. It may be possible to find funding to provide clients who do not have a smartphone and or internet connection: see sites such as <https://www.techradar.com/uk/news/best-budget-smartphone> for details of models. Once a smartphone has been purchased, it is possible to get good SIM only deals on a PAYG basis, without tying people into a contract.

Outreach, home visits and residential care

Follow the guidance in force and seek to establish remote communication channels with the host organisation and person needing advice or support. Be guided by <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-residential-care-supported-living-and-home-care-guidance> and check with care providers / outreach locations.

AdvicePro and COVID-19

As part of the ISO27001:2013 certification both ACM and hosting provider Brightsolid have Business Continuity plans in place. AdvicePro's functionality is not affected: as a web-based application, all subscribing organisations will be able to carry on recording and reporting on their data even during a shutdown or when they cannot access their main place of work. Within ACM and Brightsolid, staff are also able to work remotely, so the helpdesk will continue to function as normal even when staff are working from home. If all staff are working from home, we will advise our customers to email rather than call. See <https://www.advicepro.org.uk/> for more information or to find out more about the software.

Remote working and provision of advice

You may want to think through how you can help people who may be self-isolating: giving people advice and support over the phone; writing to people (where risk of transmission is low if appropriate hygiene measures are used, see <https://www.royalmail.com/>); or using online conferencing. Past feedback from members working remotely suggests that people are more likely to have access to smartphone apps such as WhatsApp, Skype or Facebook Messenger than software that is designed to be used on a laptop or desktop computer. It may be helpful thinking through with people how they stay in touch with you and what support may be available to them from the community from sources such as foodbanks.

Software platforms and tools for working remotely

Organisations like Charity Digital (<https://charitydigital.org.uk/> and <https://charitydigital.org.uk/topics/coronavirus-what-your-charity-needs-to-do-to-prepare-7189>) give helpful advice, including information on software that is being made available free of charge to help charities respond. We have had positive feedback from organisations using the following:

- Charity Digital Exchange <https://www.charitydigitalexchange.org/> and donated licences for a wide range of digital products, including online collaboration products such as Asana and licences for cloud-based products from vendors such as Microsoft
https://www.charitydigitalexchange.org/partner_catalogues/Microsoft%20Cloud
- Charity Digital Article <https://charitydigital.org.uk/topics/coronavirus-tech-offers-available-to-charities-7209> (will be updated regularly)
- Charity Digital blog on how tech can keep your charity working
<https://charitydigital.org.uk/topics/coronavirus-how-tech-can-keep-your-charity-working-through-a-pandemic--7215>
- Zoom <https://zoom.us/pricing>
- Skype, some AdviceUK members already use Skype to give face-to-face advice remotely. Skype for Business is being replaced with Microsoft Teams.
- Go To Meeting <https://www.gotomeeting.com/en-gb>
- Slack <https://slack.com/intl/en-gb/> see also <https://slackhq.com/>
- Microsoft Teams <https://products.office.com/en-gb/microsoft-teams/group-chat-software>
- PowWowNow <https://www.powwownow.co.uk/>

Working from home as an adviser

Let us have your feedback on what works and your experiences to date:

- Where possible, communicate with clients and find out how they want to communicate with you: be aware of potential risks around issues such as domestic abuse or changed family / household situations.
- Consider how clients may be able to use platforms like WhatsApp to send photos of key letters: secure messaging is better than unencrypted e-mail, but sensibly balance the risks of communicating via e-mail with not communicating at all.

- Set up a generic e-mail, or if possible, secure web form where clients can send information and securely upload documentation: consider how your organisation might be able to help people submit information.
- Keep good case notes and records: a cloud-based system like AdvicePro is particularly well-suited to remote access.
- Make good use of any spare time in the coming months (caveat: we recognise that many readers may be overwhelmed with additional work, changed duties and different ways of working at the moment). If there are opportunities to catch up on other things, let us know and we will do our best to support you, for example in areas such as reviewing policies and procedures, thinking about future income generation.
- Conference calling may offer possibilities if people being advised only have access to a phone: see providers such as <https://www.powwownow.co.uk/conference-call>

Scams and misinformation

Please encourage people to be on their guard against misinformation and scams. It is likely that unscrupulous individuals and groups may try to take advantage of the situation using techniques such as phishing e-mails, links that expose people to malware and so on. Full Fact <https://fullfact.org/health/what-are-symptoms-coronavirus-disease-covid-19/> has helpful resources to counter disinformation. Websites such as <https://takefive-stopfraud.org.uk/advice/> the <https://www.friendsagainstscams.org.uk/> network and <https://www.gov.uk/report-suspicious-emails-websites-phishing> give helpful advice and information on scams.