

3 March 2020

Dear Headteacher

You may have seen several reports in the news that confirm there have been two confirmed cases of Coronavirus – COVID-19 in West Sussex.

I would like to reassure you that we remain in regular contact with Public Health England to ensure we have the most up-to-date advice and information.

The Department for Education has established a coronavirus **telephone helpline 0800 0468687**, which is operational 0800-1800 Monday- Friday. You can also email DfE.coronavirushelpline@education.gov.uk with enquiries.

Schools should direct their coronavirus related queries to this in the first instance.

Please also find attached a template letter which you might find useful if you are planning on sending an update to parents and carers.

The following advice is from Public Health England, you can use the following to answer any questions.
Below that is a letter you can use to issue to parents about the latest situation.

ADVICE

The Chief Medical Officer for England will only confirm the **County** where the case has been found, not the area or location.

PHE guidance is:

- You **SHOULD NOT** confirm details of any residents affected or where they live
- You **SHOULD NOT** go into any detail about cases as patient confidentiality is paramount
- You **CAN** provide reassurance – eg. ‘I am keeping in touch with health officials. The County Council is working closely with partners to do everything it can
- You **CAN** play a key role in raising awareness of the health advice
- You **CAN** share any public media statements

Background

- The tracing and managing of contacts who have had significant exposure to confirmed cases of the novel coronavirus is being co-ordinated by Public Health England.
- The process starts with a predetermined list of information being collected on each patient. This includes details of any places visited following the

onset of symptoms or, in the case of travellers, since they arrived in the UK.

- This is either done by the clinician caring for the patient or in conjunction with them. Translation services will be used if needed to ensure the information is as accurate as possible.
- Information is also collected about significant contacts – those people in close contact with the case while symptomatic, such as household members, fellow travellers etc.
- Using the available information, all close contacts of the case will be assessed and either categorised into high or low risk. All contacts will be provided with health advice about symptoms and given emergency contact details to use if they develop symptoms in the 14 days after the exposure occurred.
- Those considered to be at higher risk will have a verbal assessment of their health and their health will be monitored on a daily basis and they will be asked to self-isolate. Should any of the group report symptoms they will be assessed and offered testing in line with current guidance.
- PHE recently used contact tracing successfully in Brighton to track all known cases and prevent any further cases.

If I live in West Sussex or Surrey am I at extra risk because of the recent cases?

- We ensure that someone with coronavirus doesn't put others at risk by treating them in isolation and carefully investigating who they had close contact with through contact tracing.
- [Contact tracing is a fundamental part of outbreak control](#) that's used by public health professionals around the world.
- If a person tests positive for coronavirus, we speak to the patient to identify anyone who has had close contact with them during the time that they are considered to be infectious, and make every effort to find these people as soon as possible.
- Once we have contacted them we can then give them the advice they need. If they are in groups considered to be a higher risk, we make sure that we follow up with them daily to see how they are. If they become unwell we are then able to assess them quickly and take appropriate action.

What does self-isolation mean for people who don't have symptoms?

- Just like when you have the flu, individuals should remain at home and should not go to work, school or public areas. Where possible, individuals should avoid having visitors to their home but it is ok for friends, family or delivery drivers to drop off food. Individuals should not use public transport or taxis until 14 days after their return from Wuhan.
- Individuals should monitor their symptoms and call NHS 111 (or your national alternative) if they develop any of the following symptoms – fever, cough, and difficulty breathing.

There are things you can do to help stop germs like coronavirus spreading:

- Always carry tissues with you and use them to catch your cough or sneeze. Then bin the tissue, and wash your hands, or use a sanitiser gel.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after using public transport. Use a sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available
- There is also an NHS link which contains hygiene and prevention advice: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

PHE advice on public events

- Most people can continue to go to work, school and other public places and only need to stay away (self-isolate) if they have been advised by NHS 111 or a medical professional.
- The virus is spread person-to-person and as the individual is receiving treatment at a specialist centre that immediate risk has been reduced.
- PHE are tracing all contacts of the case and will advise people on any actions they need to take including in some cases self-isolation.
- Everyone else should continue as normal but take care to follow public health advice to help reduce the risk of infection
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

For more info on common questions I would look at our Q&A blog which is continually updated <https://publichealthmatters.blog.gov.uk/2020/01/23/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-what-you-need-to-know/>

Do I need to avoid public places?

Most people can continue to go to work, school and other public places. You only need to stay away from public places (self-isolate) if advised to by the 111 online coronavirus service or a medical professional.
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

What can I do to reduce my risk of catching coronavirus?

There are things you can do to help stop germs like coronavirus spreading:

- Always carry tissues with you and use them to catch your cough or sneeze. Then bin the tissue, and wash your hands, or use a sanitiser gel.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after using public transport. Use a sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are unwell.

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

If I live in the area where coronavirus patients are reported as coming from – am I at extra risk?

We ensure that someone with coronavirus doesn't put others at risk by treating them in isolation and carefully investigating who they had close contact with through contact tracing.

[Contact tracing is a fundamental part of outbreak control](#) that's used by public health professionals around the world.

If a person tests positive for coronavirus, we speak to the patient to identify anyone who has had close contact with them during the time they are considered to be infectious and go all out to find these people as soon as possible.

Once we have contacted them we can then give them the advice they need. If they are in groups considered to be a higher risk, we make sure that we follow up with them daily to see how they are. If they become unwell we are then able to assess them quickly and take appropriate action.

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What about our forthcoming school trips?

We would advise you to look at the FCO website and monitor this as the situation is evolving. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-advice-novel-coronavirus>

Public Health England Advice – Warning & Informing the public

How to prevent it

Further information from Public Health England can be found [here](#) including a very short [public information video](#) on how you can help - catch it, bin it, kill it. Please take the time to watch the video, which contains practical steps to help minimise any risks.

Hygiene practices, such as regularly washing hands and always sneezing into a tissue is the best way to prevent the spread of almost any germs, including Coronavirus - see the PHE video above for more information.

How to minimise risks

Further information from Public Health England can be found [here](#) including a very short [public information video](#) on how you can help - catch it, bin it, kill it. Please take the time to watch the video, which contains practical steps to help minimise any risks.

Hygiene practices, such as regularly washing hands and always sneezing into a tissue is the best way to prevent the spread of almost any germs, including Coronavirus - see the PHE video above for more information. There is also an NHS link which contains hygiene and prevention advice : <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

Public Information Campaign

From Monday 17 February, [the COVID-19 public information materials](#) on the Campaign Resource Centre is running nationally on press, social and radio for two weeks, ending on Sunday 1st March.

The advertising places greater emphasis on the importance of hand washing with soap and water or hand sanitiser, throughout the day and advise catching coughs and sneezes in a tissue before binning and washing hands

Icons clearly bring these actions to life as the best way to protect yourself and others. The public information ads continue to reassure the public that the Government and the NHS are well prepared to deal with coronavirus.

They direct anyone arriving back from specified areas to follow the returning traveller advice. The public are advised to visit www.nhs.uk/coronavirus for further information and to check the list of affected areas.

Yours sincerely



Anna Raleigh
Director of Public Health