

MARCH 2020

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CORONAVIRUS

INFORMATION AND ADVICE



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OVERVIEW

Current Situation

As of 7:00am on 6th March 2020, a total of 20,338 people have been tested for the Coronavirus in the UK, 163 of which were confirmed to have contracted the illness. One patient who tested positive for COVID-19 has died.

Based on the World Health Organization's declaration that this is a public health emergency of international concern, UK Chief Medical Officers increased the risk to the UK from low to moderate. Health professionals are currently working to contact anyone who has been in close contact with people who have Coronavirus.

What is Coronavirus?

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) is a new illness that can affect your lungs and airways. It was first identified in Wuhan City, China. The symptoms are similar to other illnesses that are much more common, such as cold and flu:

- A cough
- A high temperature
- Shortness of breath

However, these symptoms do not necessarily mean you have the illness. Generally, Coronavirus can cause more severe symptoms in people with weakened immune systems, older people and those with long-term conditions, such as diabetes, cancer and chronic lung disease.

How is Coronavirus Spread?

With it being a new illness, we do not know exactly how Coronavirus is spread. Similar viruses are spread in cough droplets. Viruses like Coronavirus cannot live outside the body for very long and it's highly unlikely that it can be spread through things like packages or food.

You can avoid catching or spreading germs and help stop Coronavirus spreading by:

- Covering your mouth and nose with a tissue (not your hands) when you cough or sneeze, or using your sleeve if you don't have a tissue
- Putting used tissues in the bin immediately after use
- Avoiding close contact with people who are unwell
- Washing your hands with soap and water often, or if not available, use hand sanitiser gel
- Avoiding touching your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean

Treatment For Coronavirus

Currently, there is no specific treatment for Coronavirus. As antibiotics do not work against viruses, they do not help. If you contract the virus, or if there's a chance you have, you will need to stay in isolation away from other people for up to 14 days until you are recovered.

This means you should:

- Stay at home
- Not go to work, school or public places
- Not use public transport or taxis
- Ask friends, family members or delivery services to do errands for you
- Try to avoid visitors to your home, unless friends, family or delivery drivers are dropping off food



Kevin Price
*Managing Director of Thomas
Carroll Management Services*

ADVICE FOR EMPLOYERS (Health, Safety and Employment Law)

In case Coronavirus spreads more widely in the UK, here are simple steps that employers should consider to help protect the health and safety of employees. It's good practice for employers to:

- To help reduce the risks of exposure in the workplace, keep everyone updated on the actions being taken by the business
- Ensure the emergency contact details you have for employees are correct
- Make sure managers know the symptoms of Coronavirus and are aware of any relevant processes, for example sickness reporting and sick pay and procedures in case someone in the workplace contracts the illness
- Encourage employees to wash their hands regularly and ensure there are clean places to do so with hot water and soap and display posters/notices where necessary to endorse this
- Provide employees with hand sanitiser and tissues
- Display signs that discourage employees from entering the workplace when ill, outline the symptoms of the illness, emphasise the importance of self-isolation, emphasise the importance of respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene at all times
- Allow employees to travel to affected areas only if essential
- Identify high risk individuals, such as pregnant women, employees with chronic lung disorders and heart disease and consider sending them home from work
- Notify all absent employees to remain off work until they are fully recovered, and/or confirmation is obtained from their GP that they are able to return
- Ensure the frequency of office cleaning schedules is increased
- Encourage suppliers/delivery drivers to remain in vehicles and minimise interaction

What if someone who has contracted the illness comes to work?

If someone with Coronavirus comes to work, it doesn't necessarily mean the workplace has to close. The local Public Health England (PHE) or Public Health Wales (PHW) will get in contact with the employer to:

- Discuss the case
- Identify people who have been in contact with the affected person
- Carry out a risk assessment
- Advise on any actions or precautions to take

SICK PAY

The Government recently announced that workers will get statutory sick pay from the first day off work, not the fourth, to help contain Coronavirus.

Employers may need to make allowances if their workplace sickness policy requires evidence from the employee. For example, if the employee has been told to self-isolate for 14 days, they might not be able to get a sick note.

If an employee is not sick, but is unable to work because they are in self-isolation or quarantine, there is no legal ('statutory') right to pay them if:

- They have been told by a medical expert to self-isolate
- They have had to go into quarantine
- They are abroad in an affected area and are not allowed to travel back to the UK

However, it's good practice for employers to treat it as sick leave and follow their usual sick pay policy or agree that they take the time as holiday to avoid the risk of the employee attending work because they want to get paid.

If an employee is not sick but their employer tells them to stay at home (e.g. if they have returned from an affected area and their employer asks them not to come to work), they should still get their usual pay.

If an employee needs time off work to look after someone who depends on them, they are entitled to time off work. This would apply to situations relating to Coronavirus, for example:

- If an employee has children that they need to look after or arrange childcare for if their school has closed
- If they need to help their child or another dependant that are sick or need to go into isolation or hospital

Although there is no statutory right to pay for this time off, employers should consider offering pay depending on the contract or workplace policy. The amount of time that an employee needs to take off should be reasonable for the situation. For example, they might take two days off to begin with and then use holiday for the remainder.

What if an employee does not want to go to work?

If an employee feels that they do not want to go to work out of fear of catching Coronavirus, employers should listen to their concerns.

An employer must try to resolve genuine concerns to protect the health and safety of employees. For example, they could give the option to work from home.

If working from home is not an option, perhaps they could take the time off as holiday or unpaid leave. However, the employer does not have to agree to this.

What if a workplace needs to close?

As the situation stands, it's very unlikely that an employer will need to close their workplace. However, it's wise to plan in case they do need to close temporarily.

If an employer thinks that they will need to close the workplace, they need to discuss this with employees as early as possible and during the closure. It's also worth planning for this scenario by making sure that employees have a way to communicate with their employer and their colleagues.

For example, employers could:

- Ask employees who have work laptops or mobile phones to take them home so that they can continue working
- Arrange for offline tasks to be done at home for employees who do not work on computers

Unless stated in the contract or agreed otherwise, employers still need to pay employees if they close their business for a short time.

NEED ADVICE?

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Gareth Cotty
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ADVICE FOR EMPLOYERS (Business Recovery Actions)

Whilst the current view is that businesses are unlikely to need to close, the impact of the outbreak on global supply chains is likely to cause disruption to many organisations. Furthermore, with growing global instances of cancellation of events and closure of venues, the potential for wider interruption to UK businesses should be considered and it's wise to start thinking ahead in case the situation worsens.

Will my business insurance protect me?

We comment in this briefing on the **Travel Insurance** considerations and these apply equally to business travel as well as personal holidays.

If you purchase **Business Interruption Insurance**, you should check if your policy includes 'Notifiable Disease' extensions. A recent spokesperson for the Association of British Insurers said: "Standard business insurance policies are designed and priced to cover standard risks, not those that are very unlikely, such as the effects of Covid-19" and "the government's decision was unlikely to apply retrospectively."

With potential global supply chain challenges, you may find your customers are unable to pay for goods or services previously provided. Businesses who buy **Credit Insurance** may be able to recover these debts through their credit policy.

Furthermore, businesses could face claims for failing to protect their employees or the public from contracting the disease. Whilst it may be difficult to hold a business responsible, **Employers Liability** and **Public Liability** policies will provide protection for the organisation from any such challenge.

GETTING PREPARED

We advise employers to consider:

- Staying up-to-date with pandemic planning in their region
- Monitoring critical business functions, personnel and prioritising workloads
- Monitoring staff absent rates and recruiting additional resources if necessary
- Agreeing an appropriate sick leave policy (including when an employee is no longer ill and can return to work)
- Establishing disciplinary procedures for unauthorised access if an employee refuses to work because of fears of contracting the illness
- Reviewing workloads of absent employees and delegating to other resources
- Considering whether expenditure needs to be scaled back in non-critical areas to assist cash flow to support critical activities
- Providing counselling support to employees
- Assessing the need for face-to-face contact with clients and potentially cancelling/postponing meetings and instead considering the use of phones and video conferencing platforms
- Contacting customers to notify them of any likely delays and where appropriate, discussing extensions to contracts
- Encouraging potential customers to review online products or pay online
- Setting up dedicated websites/forums/hotlines to update employees/customers as deemed appropriate
- Reviewing contractual liabilities and the potential for applications of force majeure

Most importantly, we advise you to notify your insurer if an employee contracts the Coronavirus and to continuously monitor the situation with them.

If you have any questions about your business insurance and what it covers you for, please contact your Account Executive or get in touch using the contact details below.

NEED ADVICE?

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Mark Eedy
*Managing Director of Thomas Carroll
Independent Financial Advisers*

INFORMATION FOR INVESTORS

There's no doubt that concern about the Coronavirus has impacted financial markets and naturally, many investors are concerned about their investments.

In conjunction with our research partner, Square Mile, below is a review of how markets are being impacted and what this means for investors.

How is Coronavirus affecting financial markets?

The economic implications for controlling the outbreak are severe. Supply chains will be disrupted as factories close, popular events cancelled and health services under increasing strain. Markets are falling and approaching a level that we believe provides a reasonable reflection of the economic costs of the outbreak.

We have been running a cautious positioning in portfolios for some time and last week took steps to add positions that should act as insurance policies if markets fell as they have now done. Our portfolios are suffering as the market falls, but our earlier action has helped moderate the damage.

We recently formally convened to discuss whether we should take further action to protect the portfolios. Sadly, we lack a crystal ball to tell us exactly what will occur. We considered various options and concluded that markets will remain volatile, but broadly reflect the economic costs of the outbreak as it now stands.

The situation is very fluid. We agreed to make changes to some portfolios, but they are minor in impact and we will advise clients as normal once the details are worked out. We also need to be very alert to the possibility that markets will panic and overreact to the outbreak. This may present opportunities for us to redeploy some safe assets into higher yielding opportunities.

As always, we continue to monitor the situation constantly and will look to act in your best financial interests.

Jason Boomer

Investment Director, Square Mile



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Alison Davies

*Managing Director of Thomas
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ADVICE FOR TRAVELLERS

The UK Chief Medical Officers have advised those returning from an area affected by Coronavirus to stay indoors and avoid contact with other people immediately. This applies if you have returned to the UK from:

- Hubei province in China in the last 14 days, even if you do not have symptoms
- Iran, lockdown areas in northern Italy (in Lombardy: Codongo, Castiglione d'Adda, Casalpusterlengo, Fombio, Maleo, Somaglia, Bertonico, Terranova dei Passerini, Castelgerundo and San Fiorano; in Veneto: Vo'Euganeo) or special care zones in South Korea (Daegu, Cheongdo) since 19 February, even if you do not have symptoms
- Other parts of mainland China or South Korea, Hong Kong, Japan, Macau, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan or Thailand in the last 14 days and have a cough, high temperature or shortness of breath (even if your symptoms are mild)
- Other parts of northern Italy (anywhere north of Pisa, Florence and Rimini), Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar or Vietnam since 19 February and have a cough, high temperature or shortness of breath (even if your symptoms are mild)

GUIDANCE FOR UPCOMING TRAVEL

Are you covered to cancel your trip?

If you decide not to travel, you will not be able to claim on your travel insurance unless the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) have advised not to travel to that country.

If the FCO have advised against travel to your destination, you should contact your tour operator or transport and accommodation provider in the first instance for a refund of costs.

You should contact your insurer if:

- You are due to travel to an area where a regulatory body has advised against travel to and you have costs that will not be covered by your tour operator or transport provider and you can provide written evidence detailing this and any refunds you have received
- You are unable to commence your trip due to a compulsory quarantine or a regulatory authority has advised you not to leave your home, or the area you are due to travel to is 'locked down' due to quarantine
- You have a pre-existing medical condition and a medical practitioner has advised you not to travel due to a risk to your health
- You are due to travel to an area where you will need to self-isolate upon return

Important: For claims to be considered, insurance must be in place before the FCO cancel all travel to an area. If you have booked a holiday and are waiting to pay for your insurance before paying the final balance of your holiday, we advise you to secure insurance as cover might not be available should things change.

Are you covered to cut your trip short and for the additional costs to return home?

In the first instance, you should speak to your tour operator or transport and accommodation provider for a refund of costs.

Where you are on a trip and regulatory advice changes to advise against travel and you have costs that will not be covered by your tour operator or transport provider and you can provide written evidence detailing this and any refunds you have received, please contact your insurer for consideration.

Are you covered if your hotel gets quarantined whilst you are staying there, and you are unable to return home as planned?

You should speak to your tour operator or transport and accommodation provider in the first instance for a refund of costs and/or additional costs incurred.

Where you have been subject to compulsory quarantine whilst on a trip and you can provide written evidence detailing this and any refunds you have received, please contact your insurer for consideration.

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