**Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic**

**Protocol Directorate guidance**

**Stay alert to stay safe - Control the virus**

 **Save lives**

**We can all help control the virus if we all stay alert. This means you must:**

* **Stay at home as much as possible**
* **Work from home if you can**
* **Limit contact with other people**
* **Keep your distance if you go out (2m or 1m+ risk mitigation measures)**
* **Wash your hands regularly**

**Do not leave home if you or anyone in your household has symptoms**

[**For more information**](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do) **on what you can and cannot do visit the gov.uk website**

**Background:**

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is the biggest public health emergency in a generation. It has created a hitherto unprecedented social, economic and logistical strain on the UK and the world. It calls for decisive and co-ordinated global action. UK Government advice to stay at and work from home has created new and unique strain and challenges for many businesses and organisations across the country, including your diplomatic missions, consular posts and international organisations. The FCDO itself has had to adapt to the same restrictions, so we are aware of and sympathetic to many of the practical problems created by COVID-19.

The government has set out its plan to return life to as near normal as we can, for as many people as we can, as quickly and fairly as possible in order to safeguard livelihoods, but in a way that is safe and continues to protect our NHS. We ask that all diplomatic missions, consular posts and international organisations work with us during this difficult time to support their communities and staff in complying with the social distancing regulations currently in place.

On 23 June, the Prime Minister announced changes to lockdown measures in England that would apply from 4 July. This includes the re-opening of certain businesses and a reduction to 1 m for social distancing (providing mitigation measures are in place).

You can read more about what is permissible in England on the [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do-after-4-july) website.

You can read more about what is permissible in Scotland here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-individuals-and-businesses-in-scotland>

You can read more about what is permissible in Wales here:

<https://gov.wales/coronavirus>

You can read more about what is permissible in Northern Ireland here:

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/coronavirus-covid-19>

**Guidance**

In order to support you through this difficult time we have provided some guidance to help keep your premises, staff and nationals safe\*. Additional central Government general FAQs regarding the **implementation** of COVID restrictions can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do>

*\*Throughout this guidance ’missions’ refers to all diplomatic missions, consular posts and international organisations.*

**Social Distancing**

All individuals who enjoy privileges and immunities in the UK have an obligation to respect the UK’s laws and regulations. We appreciate the cooperation and support of all diplomatic missions, consular posts and international organisations in this regard.

**Deciding to re-open premises**

The UK Government is keen to encourage a return to life as near normal for as many people, as quickly and as fairly as possible to safeguard livelihoods; but in a way that is safe and continues to protect the NHS. Missions in the UK will play a very important role in this transition. Protocol Directorate is therefore supportive of missions’ decisions to re-open, providing appropriate safety measures are in place. Although we may be unable to assist with certain face-to-face services at present, our DMIOU teams continue to be available to assist with any queries missions may have in this regard through the usual email addresses (details at the end of this document).

Prior to opening, missions should consider undertaking an assessment of the risks that COVID-19 presents to their premises. They might consider sharing the results of their own such assessments and mitigating factors with staff and the public (via their website), to offer reassurance that appropriate safety measures are in place. An example poster can be found here:

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5eb97d30d3bf7f5d364bfbb6/staying-covid-19-secure.pdf>

Missions that choose to re-open should continue to make every effort to comply with UK Government guidance on social distancing. They should carefully consider which activities are essential to their operations, especially those that require face-to-face interaction. Missions should avoid any activities which would, if implemented in the normal way, require members of the public or staff to gather in groups in excess of 6 people from different households in public places or be unable to keep more than 2 metres apart (or 1 metre plus mitigation measures apart) at all times.

**5 steps to working safely**

**Practical actions for businesses to take based on 5 main steps:**

* **Carry out a COVID-19 risk assessment**
* **Develop cleaning, handwashing and hygiene procedures**
* **Help people work from home**
* **Maintain 2m social distancing where possible)**
* **Where people cannot be 2m apart, manage transmission risk**

Further advice on working safely during coronavirus can be found [here](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19).

It is against the law for gatherings of more than 30 people to take place in private homes (including gardens and other outdoor spaces). Missions following COVID-19 Secure guidelines can host larger groups. This can include community activities and support groups, which we advise should be limited to no more than 30 people, subject to your own capacity limits. Although any individual groups should not interact with anyone outside of the group they are attending the venue with - so in a group no larger than two households or six people if outdoors.

Where social distancing guidelines cannot be followed in full in relation to a particular activity, missions should consider whether that activity is absolutely essential for business to operate. If they deem it is, then missions should take all mitigating actions possible to reduce the risk of transmission between their staff.

**Regional offices**

For consular posts and international organisations based in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, be aware that implementation and specific advice may vary. This is due to some of the major public services affected by the pandemic, in particular public health services and education, being the responsibility of the devolved administrations. For example, in England people are permitted to meet outside in groups of no more than six individuals (from different households). In Scotland, eight individuals are permitted to meet (from three households).

For further implementation of COVID crisis restrictions and advice in the devolved nations please see these websites:

Scotland: <https://www.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19>

Wales: <https://gov.wales/coronavirus>

Northern Ireland: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/coronavirus-covid-19>

Although there may be some variation in measures across the four nations of the UK, the Government is working closely with the devolved administrations to ensure a coordinated, one UK recovery effort. Care must also be taken to stay up to date with any local lockdowns that may be in place. For further information please refer to the [local lockdown restrictions page](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/leicestershire-coronavirus-lockdown-areas-and-changes).

**Informing of intention to re-open**

Protocol Directorate would appreciate pre-notification of any intention to re-open to the public or hold specific events expected to attract significant numbers of people so that we can try to assist with any issues as necessary including liaising with any other local authorities where relevant. Please coordinate with your usual Protocol Directorate contact (details at the end of this document).

**Staffing the premises**

People who can work from home should continue to do so. Missions should decide, in consultation with their employees, whether it is viable for them to continue working from home. Where it is decided that workers should come into their place of work then this will need to be reflected in the risk assessment and actions taken to manage the risks of transmission in line with the guidance. British diplomatic and consular missions overseas and the FCDO in the UK have reduced to a bare minimum the number of staff who need to travel to work whilst the vast majority of staff work from home. We recommend that missions in the UK follow a similar approach.

Staff should be encouraged to walk, cycle or drive to work where possible, and only use public transport if they have no other option. If they do use public transport, they must wear something that covers their nose and mouth and stay 1 metre (plus mitigation measures) apart from other people where possible. Specific guidance on use of public transport can be found [here](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-travel-guidance-for-passengers#public-transport)

If a member of staff should become unwell with COVID-19 symptoms (a high temperature, a new, continuous cough or a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste), they should be sent home immediately, and get a coronavirus test as soon as possible. Then follow UK Government [guidance on self-isolation](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/self-isolation-and-treatment/when-to-self-isolate-and-what-to-do/). A rigorous clean of the premises should also be undertaken.

Where diplomatic missions, consular posts and international organisations own more than one premises, staff are permitted to travel between them irrespective of distance. They should take hygiene and safety precautions if using services on the way and avoid using public transport wherever possible. If visiting other parts of the UK (Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) they must adhere to the laws and guidance of the devolved administrations at all times. Care must also be taken to stay up to date with any local lockdowns that may be in place. For further information please refer to the [local lockdown restrictions page](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/leicestershire-coronavirus-lockdown-areas-and-changes).

**Tips for good practice in the workplace**

It is good practice to keep staff updated on action taken to reduce risks of exposure to coronavirus in their workplace. Managers should know how to spot COVID-19 symptoms and ensure officers’ contact and emergency contact details are up to date.

Premises should have enough places for staff to wash hands for 20 seconds with soap and water, and provide enough hand sanitiser and tissues. Premises should be frequently cleaned; objects and surfaces touched regularly should be disinfected using standard cleaning products.

Where possible, workstations should be assigned to an individual and not shared. If they do need to be shared they should be shared by the smallest number of people. Where it is not possible to remain 2 metres (or 1 metre with mitigation measures) apart, staff should work side by side, or facing away from each other, rather than face to face. Where face-to-face contact is essential, this should be kept to 15 minutes or less wherever possible.

The public entrance to the property should be regulated so that the premises do not become overcrowded, with additional signage deployed to ask visitors not to enter the premises if they have symptoms. Regular announcements should be made to remind staff and visitors to follow social distancing advice and wash their hands regularly.

One-way flows throughout the building are encouraged. In public facing areas, signage should be used to direct the public into lanes, if feasible, while maintaining a 2 metre~~s~~ (or 1 metre with mitigation measures) distance. Floor markings could be used to mark the distance, particularly in the most crowded areas (for example, where queues form).

The use of face coverings is encouraged in enclosed spaces where social distancing is not possible. Evidence suggests that the virus is less likely to be passed on in well- ventilated buildings and outdoors. In good weather, where possible, doors and windows might be left open in more crowded areas. Use external extractor fans to keep spaces well ventilated well applicable, and make sure that ventilation systems are set to maximise the air flow rate. Heating and cooling systems can be used at their normal temperature settings.

If feasible, transparent barriers should be placed at points of regular face to face interaction as an additional element of protection for both staff and visitors (where visitors might touch or lean against these, ensure they are cleaned and disinfected as often as is feasible in line with standard cleaning procedures).

Where possible, we encourage the use of digital and remote transfers of materials, such as e-forms and emails, rather than paper versions. Where it is not possible to use digital transfers, missions should find ways to remove direct contact, such as drop-off points or transfer zones.

**Practicalities for staff**

Staggering on-premises hours will help reduce public transport use during peak periods, providing benefit to employees and the wider public effort. The staggering of operations and public services should also be considered so that only one team needs to be on site at a time, enabling them to operate at a safe distance (2 metres apart or 1 metre with mitigation measures) from one another and thereby limiting the possibility of transition between staff. Missions should assist the Track and Trace service by keeping a temporary record of shift patterns for 21 days.

Non-essential movement within the building should be discouraged. Missions might consider restricting access to some areas, encouraging the use of radios, telephones, or other electronic devices to communicate.

Where possible, staff should be encouraged to bring their own food, and staff canteens and distributors should provide a takeaway service only. Where there are no practical alternatives, workplace canteens may remain open to provide food to staff with appropriate adjustments for social distancing.

There are no additional precautions needed for handling post or packages. Staff should continue to follow existing risk assessments and safe systems of working. Diplomatic bags will continue to be processed.

Further UK Government guidelines for returning safely to work in an office or contact centre in England can be found on the Gov.uk website ([www.gov.uk/workingsafely](http://www.gov.uk/workingsafely)).

For Scotland:

<http://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-phase-1-business-and-physical-distancing-guidance/>

For Wales:

<https://gov.wales/taking-all-reasonable-measures-maintain-physical-distancing-workplace>

For Northern Ireland:

<https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/coronavirus-workplace-safety-guidance-and-priority-sector-list-published>

**Use of Missions**

**Events and receptions**.

It is against the law for gatherings of more than 30 people to take place in private homes (including gardens and other outdoor spaces). Missions following COVID-19 Secure guidelines can host larger groups. This can include community activities and support groups, which we advise should be limited to no more than 30 people, subject to your own capacity limits. Although any individual groups should not interact with anyone outside of the group they are attending the venue with - so in a group no larger than two households or six people if outdoors.

Where social distancing guidelines cannot be followed in full in relation to a particular activity, missions should consider whether that activity is absolutely essential for business to operate. If they deem it is, then missions should take all mitigating actions possible to reduce the risk of transmission between their staff.

**Ballots and elections.** Her Majesty’s Government encourages all citizens globally to exercise their democratic and constitutional rights. It is essential that in the present circumstances any balloting is conducted with full regard to the UK’s public health regulations and corresponding guidance (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) including in relation to social distancing. The best way of achieving that is to avoid in-person voting in favour other approaches, such as postal or other voting mechanisms. We acknowledge that in this case this is not fully possible so we would ask that all efforts are made to ensure any in person voting takes place safely and in compliance with public health measures in the UK. This can be achieved by conducting a risk assessment as set out by Public Health England in their ‘Working safely during Coronavirus’ guidance for England and Scotland and by providing clear advice to your voters on the practical steps they can take to protect themselves, the local community and Embassy/consulate staff whilst they travel to and from the polling station; whilst they are queuing to enter the polling stations; during voting itself as well as when returning home.

More detailed information and guidance for those arranging or planning to attend gatherings in England can be found [here.](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Cbnicholas%5CAppData%5CLocal%5CMicrosoft%5CWindows%5CINetCache%5CContent.Outlook%5CUKB6SJYJ%5C.%20https%3A%5Cwww.gov.uk%5Cguidance%5Ccovid-19-guidance-for-mass-gatherings)

For [Scotland](https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-to-organisers-on-mass-events/)

For [Wales](https://gov.wales/guidance-staying-local-and-gatherings-coronavirus)

For [Northern Ireland](https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-regulations-guidance-and-what-they-mean-you)

**Travel to the UK**

Under the Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (England)

Regulations 2020 (and equivalent regulations elsewhere in the UK), international travellers arriving in the UK from 8 June 2020 have been subject to new public health restrictions. These restrictions are:

a. The mandatory collection of personal data from arriving passengers via

an online ‘contact locator’ form;

b. A mandatory requirement for all people arriving in the UK to self-isolate

at a location they specify for a period of 14 days.

The Government is satisfied that it is now safe to ease health protection measures in England for those arriving from the countries and territories on the [Travel Corridor list](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-travel-corridors#travel-corridors-countries-and-territories-exemption-list). From 10 July 2020 passengers do not have to self-isolate when arriving in England, if they:

1. are travelling or returning from a travel corridor country; and
2. have not been to or stopped/transited in a country or territory that is not on the list in the previous 14 days.

The list of travel corridor countries includes the British Overseas Territories and the Common Travel Area.

Irrespective of starting point, all arrivals are still required to fill out the contact locator form.

However, all members of the diplomatic community\* will be exempt from filling in the contact locator form and those members of the diplomatic community who have been certified by their Heads of Mission/IO as needing to undertake duties on arrival that are essential to the functioning of the mission/consular post or IO and which cannot be done while self-isolating are also exempt from the requirement to self-isolate for 14 days on arrival. Family members and dependents are not eligible for this exemption and will be required to self-quarantine in line with the Regulations.

\*Members of the diplomatic community in the context of this regulation are:

a) A member of a diplomatic mission in the UK

b) A member of a consular post in the UK

c) An officer or servant of an International Organisation

d) Employed by an International Organisation as an expert or on a mission

e) A representative to an International Organisation

f) A representative at an International or United Kingdom conference who is granted

P&Is in the UK

g) A member of the official staff of a person in (e) or (f)

h) A person described in (a) or (b) who is passing through the United Kingdom to commence or continue their functions at a diplomatic mission or consular post in another country or territory, or to return to the country of their nationality,

k) A diplomatic or consular courier

l) A member of the family forming part of the household of a person falling within any

of the above categories

How to obtain exemption letters

FCDO Protocol Directorate will process exemption letters for individuals in the above categories. To obtain exemption letters for government officials wishing to visit the UK to conduct official business with the UK, please contact the relevant FCDO geographic desk for guidance.

In order that we can provide exemption letters covering the above measures, we are asking missions and international organisations (rather than individual travellers) to inform FCDO Protocol Directorate in advance of any intended travel by members of staff. Missions/international organisations should download the pre-notification form

(**Form 0 (COVID-19v3**) from the Protocol website: <https://protocol.fcdo.gov.uk/> and email it to (Protocol.Covid19@fcdo.gov.uk ) as soon as they are notified of intended travel, but no later than two working days prior to travel. We can only accept electronic applications at present due to the majority of FCDO staff working from home and being unable to receive or process paper applications.

**Q&A**

**How do we obtain letters exempting staff from the new border measures and self-isolation?**

Please refer to the specific guidance on this issue, which is also available on the [Protocol website](https://protocol.fco.gov.uk/).

**I am coming from a travel corridor country - do I still need to fill in the form?**

Arrivals from travel corridor countries are still expected to fill in the contact locator form. You will need to fill in the Form 0 (COVID-19v3) if you would like to be exempted from this requirement.

**I only want exemption from filling in the contact locator form, do I still need to get my head of mission to certify?**

No. certification by your head of mission is only needed for exemption from self- isolation.

**I am coming from a travel corridor country but have a short transit through a hub airport on my way which isn’t a travel corridor country; do I still need to self-isolate on arrival?**

Yes, there is a risk that you will come into contact with people from non-travel corridor countries so you will be expected to self-isolate on arrival in the UK.

**Do I need to request exemption from completing the contact locator form if I am travelling by land?**

Yes: the revised measures apply to all travel to England, by train, ferry, coach, air or any other route.

**My country is not on the travel corridor list, will it be added soon?**

The Government will continue to take the best public health advice and review the list of countries and territories regularly, and hopes to be able to add others to the exemption list. Border measures could be re-imposed at short notice for any country or territory if the risk worsens.

**I am flying in to Edinburgh. Do I still need to self-isolate?**

The Devolved Administrations will publish their own policy for travel into Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in the coming days.

**When are you going to resume issuing exempt vignettes and return passports that already have been submitted to Protocol Directorate?**

The UK Government is encouraging the vast majority of its staff to work from home.

When it is deemed safe to do so, and following Government/PHE guidelines, we will return to the office. However, it is important to note that the Home Office department which prints the vignettes has had to temporarily close its office-based operation since lockdown was enforced in England. We do not know when our colleagues will be able to return to their office. Clearly this will have an impact on our ability to process passports.

**Further Queries**

Please direct any queries in the first instance to your DMIOU team, using the usual e-mail addresses:

Protocol.DMIOUTeam1@fcdo.gov.uk

Protocol.DMIOUTeam2@fcdo.gov.uk

Protocol.DMIOUTeam3@fcdo.gov.uk

Protocol.DMIOUTeam4@fcdo.gov.uk

These mailboxes will continue to be monitored during working hours throughout the current Coronavirus arrangements.