

18 May 2020

Government press conferences 15 - 17 May

Sunday (17 May), the [press conference](#) was chaired by the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Alok Sharma. The Government announced a new Vaccines Taskforce to co-ordinate the efforts of government, academia and industry on the acceleration of the development of a vaccine.

Saturday (16 May), the [press conference](#) was chaired by the Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson. The Government outlined their response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the plans for children to return to school safely.

Friday (15 May), the [press conference](#) was chaired by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Matt Hancock. The Government announced that the COVID alert level is moving to Level 3, and initial steps to modify social distancing rules were being taken.

The press conference slides and datasets are available to view online for [15 May](#), [16 May](#) and [17 May](#).

As of 10.30pm on 17 May, the total number of lab-confirmed cases was **243,695**. The daily number of lab-confirmed cases was **3,534**. The total number of Covid-19 associated deaths was **34,636**, with **170** new deaths reported on the day. The data is available to [view online](#).

National context

Update to the coronavirus symptoms

The Government has [announced](#) new information about Covid-19 symptoms. From today (18 May), all individuals should self-isolate if they develop a new continuous cough or fever or anosmia (a loss or changed sense of normal smell or taste). All members of their household must also self-isolate according to current guidelines, unless the symptomatic individual receives a negative test result.

Infection Control Fund

The Department of Health and Social Care has [confirmed](#) details of the new £600 million Infection Control Fund to reduce transmission of coronavirus in care homes, as announced in Prime Minister's Questions last week. The fund, which is ringfenced for social care, will be given to local authorities to ensure care homes can continue to halt the spread of Covid-19 by helping them cover the costs of implementing measures to reduce transmission. The Government has also [published](#) guidance which provides detailed information on the support package.

Social housing

The Minister of State for Housing, Christopher Pincher, has [written](#) to social housing residents in England setting out all the measures that are in place to support them during the next phase of easing restrictions.

Schools

The Department for Education has [published](#) a response to issues raised regarding the science on Covid-19 which draws on information from the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) and its sub-group the Children's Task and Finish Working Group, as well as the broader advice from engagement with Public Health England.

The Department for Education has [updated](#) the actions for schools guidance with the actions that will need to be taken in preparation for the wider reopening of schools on 1 June.

A planning guide for primary school leaders to help prepare them to open their schools for more pupils has also been [published](#).

Free school meals

The Department for Education has [updated](#) the information for schools and local authorities on free school meals arrangements about claiming for additional costs, providing meals or food parcels, and ordering vouchers to cover multiple weeks.

Vulnerable children

It has also [updated](#) the guidance for education settings and local authorities about supporting vulnerable children and young people. It now reflects the wider plans for more year groups to return to education settings.

Early years and childcare

Guidance was [updated](#) on for early years and childcare providers which includes: a new section on welcoming back all children to early years settings from 1 June, information on when childminders can reopen to more children, information on testing for essential workers, and information for parents on temporary changes to the 30 hours free early education entitlements.

Safe working in education, childcare and children's social care

The Department for Education has [published](#) new guidance on preventing and controlling infection in education, childcare and children's social care settings.

Vaccine

The Government has [confirmed](#) that researchers at Oxford University, working to find a Covid-19 vaccine, will receive £84 million of new funding. This comes as a global licensing agreement was signed between Oxford University and AstraZeneca for the commercialisation and manufacturing of their potential vaccine.

The Government [announced](#) up to £93 million investment to accelerate construction of the UK's first dedicated Vaccine Manufacturing and Innovation Centre in Oxfordshire.

Immunity

The Department of Health and Social Care has [confirmed](#) that up to 20,000 people will be asked to take part in a new government-funded study led by UK Biobank to further track the spread of Covid-19.

Detection dog trial

The Department of Health and Social Care has [announced](#) that trials for specially-trained 'COVID dogs' that may be able to detect coronavirus in humans, even before symptoms appear, are set to begin as part of new research.

Places of worship

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has [confirmed](#) agreement with faith leaders to develop a plan to enable the phased and safe reopening of places of worship in step three of its plan to lift restrictions.

Bathing season

The Government has [issued](#) information on this year's bathing season (15 May- 30 September) and has confirmed that as part of the revised guidance, people can swim in lakes and the sea, provided that [social distancing guidelines](#) are observed.

The Environment Agency has temporarily paused bathing water sampling, although this will not affect water quality.

The Maritime and Coastguard Agency is [urging](#) people taking part in sea-based activities to ensure they are safe and protected. People must be aware that many beaches are not lifeguarded, so it is important to carry a mobile phone to seek help from the Coastguard (999) if needed.

Reproduction number (R)

On Friday (15 May) the Government Office for Science [published](#) the latest R number range for the UK – 0.7-1.0. The R number will be updated every week on the [GO-Science website](#).

Waste collections

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has [updated](#) the guidance for local authorities on waste collection to reflect changes to the rules on necessary journeys.

International aid

The Department for International Development has [announced](#) which charities and NGOs have received UK aid funding to help fight Covid-19 in the developing world.

Prisons

The Government has [announced](#) that following a successful trial, secure video calls will be introduced in phases to prisons and young offender institutions to maintain vital family contact during the pandemic.

Travel

The British Embassy has [issued](#) guidance for UK nationals about which attestation form to use when travelling to and within France during the Covid-19 decree.

Freight

The Department for Transport has [announced](#) that agreements have been signed with six operators to provide up to £35 million to help ensure there is enough freight capacity to prevent disruption to the flow of goods.

The Government has [added](#) further clarification to the freight transport industry guidance.

Connectivity

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport has [announced](#) new support packages provided by mobile and broadband companies for vulnerable consumers and frontline NHS staff.

Pet owners

The Government has [updated](#) the guidance for pet owners and livestock keepers on looking after the welfare of their animals during the pandemic.

Recreational general aviation (GA)

The Department for Transport has [updated](#) the guidance on GA flying during the pandemic to reflect the limited relaxation of restrictions.

Homelessness response fund

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has [published](#) information on how charitable homelessness and rough sleeping organisations can apply for a share of £6 million funding to support their response to the pandemic.

County Councils Network (CCN)

The CCN is [urging](#) the Government to work with councils to design a comprehensive strategy to protect council finances against potential losses. The network is highlighting that a severe uncertainty on future income, including council tax payments, coupled with growing cost pressures, is contributing to some councils' fears that they may have no choice but to issue a section 114 notice.

Local context

Priority Cutting Lists

The increased popularity of Rights of Way during Covid-19 means that the network requires good maintenance to ensure that the paths are safe for use. The recommissioning of the cutting contract has been affected by Covid-19, with contractors unable to start work. Consequently, the Countryside Service has decided to deliver the work directly, for this season only. The County Council is mobilising teams and will be working closely with Parish and Town Councils to ensure that the network of paths is open to communities. We will shortly provide updates on the current position and continue to explore alternative arrangements to ensure that the paths on Priority Cutting Lists (PCL) are cut. For more information, please contact: north.access@hants.gov.uk.

HantsHelp4Vulnerable - automated calls

The Coronavirus Hampshire Helpline - Hantshelp4Vulnerable – set up to assist frail and vulnerable local residents with essential shopping, medication collections and befriending, is now reaching out directly to people, designated by the NHS as ‘extremely vulnerable’ - to offer support, should they need it. While continuing to respond to requests for help, the new automated service is contacting more than 1,200 people each day to offer support.

The automated system has allowed the County Council to reach out very quickly to the most vulnerable. Unfortunately, some calls are not being answered, possibly due to concerns about their authenticity. Communications are being issued today asking residents not to hang up if they receive a call from the County Council – and emphasising the support being offered. More information is available in the [press release](#).

Mental Health Awareness Week

This Mental Health Awareness Week (18-24 May), Hampshire’s Executive Member for Public Health, Councillor Judith Grajewski, is [reminding](#) residents that it is more important than ever to be kind to family, friends and neighbours as people continue to adapt to the pressures and restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic. [Every Mind Matters](#) offers tips and advice on looking after your mental health and wellbeing.

Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs)

The re-opening of HWRCs on Monday (11 May) caused expected queues and traffic delays, around 4,000 visits were made to the HWRCs each day last week. Residents are being [reminded](#) to only travel to HWRCs if their journey is essential, and to reconsider their trip if they encounter long queues at the sites when they arrive. The County Council is reviewing traffic management plans at sites and is working to improve throughput.

The start date for the HWRC vehicle registration scheme has been postponed due to the pandemic. However, the [online vehicle registration system](#) remains open in readiness for implementation later this year.

Hampshire Constabulary

Chief Constable, Olivia Pinkney, has written to stakeholders with an update on how the Constabulary is operating during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Constabulary’s

role of ‘helping keep communities safe’ has been enhanced since the outbreak to also protect the NHS and save lives. The Constabulary recognise the efforts of the public within Hampshire of following Government advice and it is reported that Police have only had to resort to formal Enforcement by way of a Fixed Penalty Notice a handful of times a day.

The Constabulary remain alert to the different crimes and vulnerabilities which are heightened because of Covid-19 restrictions, including domestic abuse, fraud and online exploitation, public order, and drug related harm. They ask the public to stay vigilant, and to continue to report any emergencies through 999.

South Western Railway (SWR)

SWR has confirmed that from today (18 May) they are increasing service capacity. They will continue to operate a reduced service however, some routes will have services reinstated, longer services or extra services during peak times. Due to social distancing measures, capacity will be vastly reduced, SWR are therefore urging customers to consider alternative means of transport and to only use public transport where there is no other option.

SWR has received c.29,000 requests for refunds and has processed more than half of these. They continue to consider how the refunds process could be sped up and improved.

Additional links

- Hampshire County Council webpages on coronavirus (including links to press releases): <https://www.hants.gov.uk/socialcareandhealth/coronavirus>
- Latest information on coronavirus: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>
- NHS information on coronavirus: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>
- Q&A from Public Health England on coronavirus: <https://publichealthmatters.blog.gov.uk/2020/01/23/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-what-you-need-to-know/>
- Guidance for local government: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-local-government>
- County Councils Network (CCN) coronavirus information pages: <https://www.countycouncilsnetwork.org.uk/coronavirus-information-for-local-authorities/>
- Local Government Association (LGA) councillor guidance: <https://www.local.gov.uk/covid-19-outbreak-councillor-guidance>

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