

No. 043/2020

27 January 2020

Our Ref: E1/20

**To: All Branches**

Dear Colleagues,

**Coronavirus and Avian Flu Outbreaks in China – Statements From Royal Mail Group, Department of Social Care (DHSC) and Public Health England (PHE) and Further Advice:**

This is an update further to LTB No. 033/2020, issued on 22 January 2020.

**Royal Mail Group Statement:**

Royal Mail Group issued the attached advice on their intranet site on Friday morning 24 January and stated that the Business is monitoring the Coronavirus outbreak situation in China and will issue more updates as appropriate following advice from Public Health England (PHE). PHE maintain that the risk to the UK population has been assessed as low and should this assessment change, the NHS is well prepared. Royal Mail has advised that as with all mail handling and all other roles, good hand and personal hygiene should be maintained to minimise the risk of any infection of colds and flu, which are very common at this time of year. Hands should always be washed before eating and any gloves worn for mail handling should be washed frequently. Royal Mail has decided that although the risk of infection is very low, while the Coronavirus situation is developing, **disposable gloves** will be made available to anyone handling large numbers of parcels or letters originating from China who would like to wear them as an additional precaution. Any member wishing to be provided with the disposable gloves should request them from their manager. Details of how they are to be ordered have been provided to Office Managers and are contained in the attached Royal Mail statement.

**[Department of Health and Social Care \(DHSC\) and Public Health England \(PHE\)](#)**

The latest news update and statement from DHSC and PHE jointly is attached. They confirm continued enhanced monitoring of the Coronavirus situation in Wuhan, China and are ready to put in place proportionate, precautionary measures to protect the UK public. All direct flights from Wuhan, China to the UK are being met and [advice and support to travellers](#) is being provided if they feel unwell. The team involved includes medical inspectors, doctors, admin support and a team leader. They will check for symptoms of Coronavirus and provide information to all passengers about symptoms and what to do if they become ill. Mandarin and Cantonese language support will be available and leaflets will be available to all passengers.

DHSC has issued clinical guidance for the detection and diagnosis of Coronavirus, and PHE has developed a diagnostic test, making the UK one of the first countries outside China to have a prototype specific laboratory test for this new disease.

The UK is well prepared for new diseases and the UK's approach is kept under constant review. UK public health measures are world-leading and the NHS is well prepared to manage and treat new diseases.

Despite the current reports of 2000 confirmed cases and 50 deaths in China and confirmed cases of 15 other places outside China, DHSC and PHE confirm that the risk to the UK population has been assessed as low, based on the emerging evidence regarding case numbers, potential sources and human to human transmission. To date there are no confirmed cases of this new infection in the UK.

### **Can you catch Coronavirus from Parcels and Packages Posted from China to the UK?**

According to BBC health and science correspondents Dr. Michelle Roberts and Biologist James Gallagher along with the US Department of Health in Minnesota, the answer is no, there is no evidence this is a risk. These Medical experts say the Coronavirus can only survive on inanimate objects for a few hours, maybe a day or two in perfect laboratory conditions and parcels and packages from China take several days to arrive. Some diseases can spread through surfaces contaminated by people coughing or sneezing on them. It has not been shown this new Coronavirus can do that. Even if it could, there would still be questions about whether international shipping would be a major problem. Cold viruses tend to survive less than 24 hours outside the human body although Norovirus (a severe stomach bug) can last for months outside the body. The most reassuring fact so far is that Coronavirus cases seem to require close contact with an infected person - say, a family member or healthcare worker - in order to spread. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that cause respiratory illnesses such as Pneumonia and Bronchitis. The viruses are in the respiratory tract and they spread mainly through the air via coughing or sneezing, through close personal contact and touching one's mouth, nose, or eyes after touching an object or surface with the virus on it, before washing one's hands.

### **Maintain Good Basic Hygiene**

The NHS and doctors advise everyone to maintain good basic hand and personal hygiene standards, washing hands regularly to minimise the risk of any infection as this virus outbreak develops.

### **Attachments:**

- Royal Mail Group Statement on Coronavirus Outbreak (24.1.20)
- [Department of Health and Social Care](#) and [Public Health England](#) Statement on Coronavirus (23.1.20)
- Public Health England - Coronavirus What You Need To Know

Yours sincerely



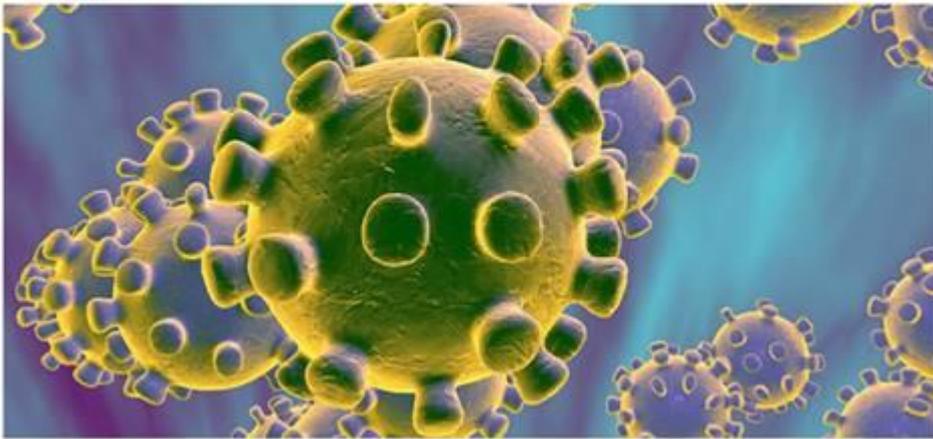
**Dave Joyce**  
**National Health, Safety & Environment Officer**

## Attachment 1

**Royal Mail Group issued the attached advice on the intranet on Friday morning 24 January and stated that they are monitoring the situation and will issue more updates as appropriate following advice from Public Health England.**

### Coronavirus outbreak in China

Author:  Nicholas Burns



**24 January 2020**

**Good hand and personal hygiene should be maintained**

#### Page Content

There has been an outbreak of Coronavirus/bird flu in China. This is a developing situation and it is being closely monitored. **The risk to the UK population has been assessed as low.** Should this assessment change, the NHS is well prepared.

As with all mail handling and all other roles, good hand and personal hygiene should be maintained to minimise the risk of any infection of colds and flu, which are very common at this time of year. Hands should always be washed before eating and any gloves worn for mail handling should be washed frequently.

**Although the risk of infection is very low, while the situation is developing, disposable gloves can be made available to anyone handling large numbers of parcels or letters originating from this area of China who would like to wear them as an additional precaution.**

To place an order for disposable gloves, [please complete a request form](#) and email it to your regional asset team. Please mark in the subject heading **\*\*URGENT\*\*** and this will be picked up and progressed as soon as it is received:

- [northassets@royalmail.com](mailto:northassets@royalmail.com)
- [southassets@royalmail.com](mailto:southassets@royalmail.com)

Note: Please specify in the description if the gloves you are ordering need to be powder free / latex free / rubber free.

We will continue to monitor the situation closely and will act on Public Health England advice which is updated daily. We will provide further updates if the advice changes.

---

The following message has been issued on My Royal Mail, the site employees can access directly from home computers.

---

**MRM.COM VERSION**

**Coronavirus outbreak in China**

There has been an outbreak of Coronavirus/bird flu in China. This is a developing situation and it is being closely monitored. **The risk to the UK population has been assessed as low.** Should this assessment change, the NHS is well prepared.

As with all mail handling and all other roles, good hand and personal hygiene should be maintained to minimise the risk of any infection of colds and flu which are very common at this time of year. Hands should always be washed before eating and any gloves worn for mail handling should be washed frequently. **Although the risk of infection is very low, while the situation is developing, disposable gloves can be made available to anyone handling large numbers of parcels or letters originating from this area of China who would like to wear them as an additional precaution.**

Please speak to your manager if you would like access to disposable gloves.

We will continue to monitor the situation closely and will act on Public Health England advice which is updated daily. We will provide further updates if the advice changes.

---

## Attachment 2

### DHSC and PHE statement on Coronavirus

23 January 2020 **Department of Health and Social Care** and **Public Health England**

We have been carefully monitoring the coronavirus situation in Wuhan and are ready to put in place proportionate, precautionary measures.

From today, enhanced monitoring will be in place from all direct flights from Wuhan to the UK. The enhanced monitoring package includes a number of measures to provide advice to travellers if they feel unwell.

For those travelling back directly from Wuhan, this includes a Port Health team who will meet each direct flight aircraft to provide advice and support to those that feel unwell. The team will include a principal port medical inspector, port health doctor, administrative support and team leader.

They will check for symptoms of coronavirus and provide information to all passengers about symptoms and what to do if they become ill. Mandarin and Cantonese language support will be available to Public Health England (PHE) and leaflets will be available to passengers.

There are 3 direct flights a week that arrive at Heathrow from Wuhan. The enhanced monitoring of direct flights will be kept under continuous review and expanded to other Chinese departure points if necessary.

Leaflets and information will be made available across all UK airports, advising travellers from China on what to do if they feel unwell.

The risk to the UK population has been assessed as low, based on the emerging evidence regarding case numbers, potential sources and human to human transmission. This has been raised from very low due to evidence on the likelihood of cases being imported into this country.

There are no confirmed cases of this new infection in the UK.

DHSC has issued clinical guidance for the detection and diagnosis of Wuhan novel coronavirus, and PHE has developed a diagnostic test, making the UK one of the first countries outside China to have a prototype specific laboratory test for this new disease.

The UK is well prepared for new diseases and our approach is kept under constant review. UK public health measures are world-leading and the NHS is well prepared to manage and treat new diseases.

Dr Nick Phin, Deputy Director, National Infection Service, PHE, said:

This is a new and rapidly evolving situation where information on cases and the virus is being gathered and assessed daily. Based on the available evidence, the current risk to the UK is considered low. We are working with the WHO and other international partners, have issued advice to the NHS and are keeping the situation under constant review.

If you are travelling to Wuhan, you should maintain good hand, respiratory and personal hygiene and should avoid visiting animal and bird markets or people who are ill with respiratory symptoms. Individuals should seek medical attention if they develop respiratory symptoms within 14 days of visiting Wuhan, either in China or on their return to the UK. They should phone ahead before attending any health services and mention their recent travel to the city.

## Attachment 3



Public Health  
England

# Coronavirus: what you need to know

23 January 2020

At PHE we respond to around 10,000 disease outbreaks and health emergencies every year both at home and abroad, ranging from e-coli, legionnaires and TB through to emerging threats such as the outbreak of a novel (new) coronavirus in Wuhan, China.

This is a rapidly evolving situation which we are monitoring carefully but based on the available evidence, the current risk to the UK population is low.

In this blog we'll answer some of the questions many people have. We'll update this blog as new information becomes available.

### **What is Wuhan novel coronavirus and should I be concerned?**

A coronavirus is a type of virus. As a group, coronaviruses are common across the world.

Typical symptoms of coronavirus include fever and a cough that may progress to a severe pneumonia causing shortness of breath and breathing difficulties.

Generally, coronavirus can cause more severe symptoms in people with weakened immune systems, older people, and those with long term conditions like diabetes, cancer and chronic lung disease.

Wuhan Novel Coronavirus is a new strain of coronavirus first identified in Wuhan City, China. No confirmed cases of Wuhan coronavirus have been detected in the UK and we currently consider the risk to the UK population to be low.

### **What is the current risk level to the UK?**

The risk to the UK population has been assessed as low. This has been raised from very low due to current evidence on the ability for the virus to spread between people.

### **How do we decide the risk level?**

Several factors are taken into account to determine the risk level including the number of cases, the speed at which new cases are being identified and other information about the virus such as how easily it spreads from person to person.

### **Can we stop the virus coming to the UK?**

No system of checks can claim to offer absolute protection because of the incubation period of the virus. Some people might only show symptoms 14 days after exposure to an infected person. Our approach to enhanced monitoring helps us ensure that travellers from Wuhan get the right information about what to do if they become unwell.

Healthcare professionals have also received advice, covering initial detection and investigation of possible cases, infection prevention and control, and clinical diagnostics so they are well prepared to assist anyone who is suspected of having Wuhan novel coronavirus.

The UK is one of the countries outside China to have an assured testing capability test for this disease. If a person is diagnosed with the virus they will be transferred to a national specialist treatment centre. High Consequence Infectious Disease (HCID) treatment centres have the facilities and specialist staff to implement robust infection control measures.

As has already been demonstrated in response to diseases like MERS, Ebola and Monkeypox, Public Health England and the NHS have robust protocols in place to manage cases of imported infections.

### **What measures are being taken to protect the UK?**

Public Health England experts are ready to provide advice to travellers arriving from China if they feel unwell. For those travelling back directly from Wuhan, this includes a specialist team who will meet each direct flight to provide advice and support.

China has announced it is restricting flights in and out of Wuhan but if they resumed, the UK would ensure that:

- a broadcast message to passengers is made on the aircraft, to encourage travellers to report their illness;
- early warnings of any passenger illness from the captain of the aircraft is made in transit. A response (nil or otherwise) will be requested no later than 60 minutes before the actual arrival time.
- we had an isolated area of London Heathrow Terminal 4 for the reception of the aircraft
- a General Aircraft Declaration (GAD) was made by the captain of the aircraft, prior to passenger disembarkation
- support in accordance with current operating procedures by the PHE teams of any self-declaring passenger, and if required the NHS

### **Shouldn't we keep people at the airport until we're sure they're not sick?**

Many people who develop symptoms will get them after leaving the airport and so our priority is providing UK residents and travellers with the latest information to make sure they know what to do if they experience symptoms. The NHS and PHE have an established plan to respond if people contact us to say they have symptoms and have recently travelled to China.

### **Why are we not monitoring all flights from China? And, what about people who have transferred from other flights?**

Plans are in place to meet any direct flights from Wuhan as experts believe this is the source of the virus. However, the enhanced monitoring of direct flights will be kept under continuous review and expanded to other Chinese departure points if necessary.

### **Can we test people for Wuhan novel coronavirus and how does this work?**

PHE is a world-leader in developing techniques to aid the public health investigation of infectious diseases. The UK is one of the countries outside China to have an assured testing capability test for this disease. It is a complex test which can differentiate this type of coronavirus from any other coronavirus.

### **What's the current travel advice?**

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has advised against "all but essential travel" to Wuhan city, Hubei Province.

If you are travelling to Wuhan, you should maintain good hand, respiratory and personal hygiene and should avoid visiting animal and bird markets or people who are ill with respiratory symptoms. Individuals should seek medical attention if they develop respiratory symptoms within 14 days of visiting Wuhan, either in China or on their return to the UK. They should phone ahead before attending any health services and mention their recent travel to the city.

### **Should I be doing anything to protect myself if I'm in the UK?**

This is a rapidly evolving situation which we are monitoring carefully but based on the available evidence, the current risk to the UK is low and no confirmed cases of Wuhan coronavirus have been detected in the UK.

NHS and PHE have an established plan to respond quickly and reduce the risk to others if people contact us to say they have symptoms and have recently travelled to China.