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Dear Colleagues,

Coronavirus Outbreak – Update & Advice

The Health, Safety & Environment Department continues monitor the situation and continues to be in daily contact with the Royal Mail Group Head of Health and the Safety, Health & Environment team regarding the Coronavirus Outbreak.

RMG are keeping the situation under review and have issued a third communication Friday evening (copy attached). RMG continues to promote the ‘good hand hygiene’ message with soap and water. Additionally, ‘Disposable Gloves’ as a barrier are being made available to anyone on request through their line manager which they recommended as an additional precaution. They are ensuring managers know how to order gloves for employees and RMGHQ will review the situation over the weekend and will decide if any further measures or communications are necessary. The Health, Safety & Environment Department has requested the provision of Hand Sanitizer Gel to the workforce.

In the meantime they have reiterated the message from the UK's Chief Medical Officer, PHE and NHS that ‘Hand hygiene’ is the first and most important line of defence.

The UK's four Chief Medical Officers have raised the risk level for coronavirus from low to moderate as the virus spreads across the world.

There are 10,000 cases in China and 220 Deaths. 25 Other Countries including the UK have now confirmed cases. The NHS are managing the two UK cases In Newcastle and announced that the cases are quarantined, being treated and they are confident that the matter is under control.

The UK's four Chief Medical Officers did add, however, the risk to individuals has not increased despite the threat level being raised. For that reason, they are advising an increase of the UK risk level from low to moderate. This does not mean they think the risk to individuals in the UK has changed at this stage, but that government have been urged to plan for all eventualities.

As they previously stated, it is likely there will be individual cases but they are confident in the ability of the NHS and HSC in Northern Ireland to manage these in a way that protects the public and provides high-quality care.

The officers are Professor Chris Whitty for England, Dr Frank Atherton for Wales, Dr Catherine Calderwood for Scotland and Dr Michael McBride for Northern Ireland.

The greatest concern of the World Health Organisation (WHO) is the potential for the virus to spread to countries with weaker health systems than the UK and others - which are ill-prepared to deal with it.

In the meantime the Chief Medical Officers, Public Health England, World Health Organisation (WHO) and the NHS emphasise the importance of 'hand hygiene' as the first and most important line of defence. Like cold and flu bugs, the new virus is spread via droplets when a person coughs or sneezes. The droplets land on surfaces and are picked up on the hands of others and spread further. People catch the virus when they touch their infected hands to their mouth, nose or eyes.

It follows that the single most important thing people can do to protect themselves is to keep their hands clean by washing them frequently with soap and water or use a hand sanitising gel.

People should also try to avoid touching their mouth, nose or eyes with unwashed hands – something we all do unconsciously on average about 15 times an hour.

Other tips include:

- Carry a hand sanitiser with, to make frequent cleaning of hands easy.
- Always wash hands before eating.
- Be especially careful in busy airports and other public transport systems about touching things and then touching your face.
- Carry disposable tissues, cover the nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing and dispose of the tissue carefully - **"Catch it, Bin it, Kill it"**.
- Do not share snacks from packets or bowls that others are dipping their fingers into.
- Avoid shaking hands or cheek kissing if you suspect viruses are circulating.
- Regularly clean, not just hands, but commonly used surfaces and devices you touch or handle.

Q & As

Is it just droplets from the nose and mouth that spread the new virus?

Probably not, but they are by far the most common risk. The NHS is advising doctors that the virus is also likely to be contained in other bodily secretions including in blood, faeces and urine. Here again, hand and surface hygiene is the key.

How can I protect my family, especially children?

Children are a major vector for the spread of droplet-based viruses because they interact physically so much with each other and are not the best at keeping themselves clean. However, you can greatly lower the risk that children pose of spreading or catching viruses by: Explaining to them how germs spread and the importance of good hand and face hygiene. Keeping household surfaces clean, especially kitchens, bathrooms and door handles. Using clean cloths to wipe surfaces, so you don't transfer germs from one surface to another. Giving everyone their own towel and making sure they know not to share toothbrushes etc. Keep your home dry and airy (bugs thrive in musty environments).

What about face masks, do they work?

Paper face masks are not generally recommended by the NHS for ordinary citizens – with good reason. They are ill-fitting and what protection they might initially provide soon expires. Worse, they quickly become moist inside providing the perfect environment for germs to thrive in. They also become a hazard for others if carelessly discarded. However, an exception to this would be if you were displaying symptoms such as coughing or sneezing – then a mask may help prevent you spreading the virus to others in busy locations. In hospitals, healthcare workers treating patients with the virus will wear masks but these are specialist devices and there are strict protocols they must follow to ensure they remain safe and effective.

Can the new coronavirus be treated?

There is no simple cure for the new coronaviruses – just as there is no cure for the common cold. In more severe cases, the virus causes pneumonia, an infection that inflames the lungs and causes breathing difficulty. This is where the main danger lies. Viral pneumonia cannot be treated with antibiotics and, for the moment at least, there are no antivirals specific to this particular virus. Instead doctors focus on supporting patients' lung function as best they can. They may be given oxygen or placed on a breathing machine (ventilator) in the most severe cases. Other symptoms such as fever and discomfort will be treated using drugs such as aspirin and ibuprofen. Secondary infections may be treated with antibiotics.

Are some groups of people more at risk than others?

Data from China suggests that people of all ages are at risk of contracting the virus. However, as with most respiratory illnesses, it is likely to be the young and old who are most at risk once infected. People with a reduced chance of surviving pneumonia include:

- Those over age 65.
- Children under the age of two.
- People with underlying health conditions or a weakened immune system.

As data accumulates, a much clearer picture of the particular risk groups for the new virus will emerge.

Is there a vaccine for the new coronavirus?

There is currently no vaccine but researchers in the US, UK and China have already begun working on one, thanks to China's prompt sharing of the virus's genetic code. However, any potential vaccine will not be available for up to a year and would most likely be given to health workers most at risk of contracting the virus first. For now, it is a case of containment. China has started building several 1,000-bed hospitals to treat patients which it hopes to finish within days. Capacity to treat patients who require both ventilation and isolation will also be the biggest challenge for the NHS if the virus takes hold in the UK.

What advice has the UK government issued?

In addition to the advice on symptoms above, the British government has been advising against "all but essential" travel to China. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is also evacuating British citizens from China's most affected region.

What is happening at UK airports?

Public Health England (PHE) has announced "enhanced monitoring of direct flights" from China and has a small rota of doctors who are on hand at Heathrow to provide information and deal with possible cases. British Airways and Virgin Atlantic have ceased direct flights. In other major hub airports around the world, the authorities have gone further and are checking passengers temperature on arrival and distributing hand sanitisers to combat the spread of the virus. Good quality research suggests that hand cleansing at Heathrow and nine other global air hubs could slash the spread of the virus by up to 40%.

Where is the best place to sit on a plane?

The best place to sit is at a window in the middle of the cabin, so research suggests. This is because it reduces your risk of being infected by droplets shed by people walking up and down the aisles.

What is the difference between a coronavirus and a flu virus?

Coronaviruses and flu viruses might cause similar symptoms but genetically they are very different. Flu viruses incubate very rapidly – you tend to get symptoms two to three days after being infected, but coronaviruses take much longer, say disease outbreak scientists at Imperial College London. With the flu virus you become immune but there are lots of different viruses circulating. Coronaviruses don't evolve in the same way as flu with lots of different strains, but equally our body doesn't generate very good immunity.

What risks are presented if the coronavirus mutates?

Chinese officials have warned that the virus is already starting to mutate, which means there's a chance that the disease could start to infect many more people. The worry is that if you have a new virus that is exploring a human host it's possible that they might mutate and spread more easily in humans, say virologists at the University of Nottingham. The genetic sequence of the virus shows a slow mutation rate.

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. Use sanitizer gel, use gloves when working as an added barrier precaution.

Any enquiries regarding this Letter to Branches should be addressed to the Health, Safety & Environment Department on telephone number 020 8971 7365.

Yours sincerely,



Dave Joyce
National Health, Safety & Environment Officer

Communication Issued By Royal Mail 31.01/20

Coronavirus.

As you will have seen, there is an outbreak of coronavirus. The virus originated in Wuhan City, Hubei Province China and has now been declared a global emergency by the World Health Organization (WHO).

It has now been confirmed by the chief medical officer for England that two people from the same family have tested positive for coronavirus in the UK.

We take the wellbeing of our employees extremely seriously. We are following the situation in China closely to keep our guidance for our people up to date and reduce any potential impact on individuals, our customers and our communities. We are monitoring information published by the Chinese authorities, Public Health England and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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.

At present the information from Public Health England, who we are working closely with, informs us the risk that the virus can transmit outside the human host and from surfaces is low. The usual work practices including the use of gloves where required and good hand hygiene are required. Disposable gloves can be made available to anyone on request through their line manager and are a recommended 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 progressed as soon as it is received:

- northassets@royalmail.com
- southassets@royalmail.com

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

Normal procedures should be followed for any damaged parcels from China and particular care taken to avoid direct contact with the contents if they appear to contain meat/dead birds or other animals.

Travel advice

The Foreign Office is currently advising against all but essential travel to mainland China. Some airlines have also cancelled all flights to and from the country.

Capita, Royal Mail Group's travel partner, have also updated their portal with the latest travel advice. If you are planning to travel to China on Royal Mail business, you must cancel this and not travel at this time.

With cases being diagnosed in other countries, the latest foreign travel advice (www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) should be considered before any international travel.

In the interests of employee health we strongly recommend that colleagues on personal visits do not travel to China.

Anyone who has recently returned from China and developed a fever, cough or difficulty breathing within the first 14 days should self-isolate and stay at home, call their GP or NHS 111 and report their recent travel.

Please speak to your line manager if you have any questions or concerns.

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.
