

No. 071/20

11th February 2020

Dear Colleague,

Coronavirus Outbreak – General Update, Royal Mail Latest Advice, FAQs and CWU Royal Mail Members Returning From China

This update to Branches and Regions follows LTBs 033/20, 043/20, 054/20 and 063/20.

Background

You will obviously be aware of the above which has dominated world news since 31 December 2019, when the World Health Organisation's (WHO) China office heard the first reports of a previously-unknown virus behind a number of pneumonia cases in Wuhan, a city in Eastern China with a population of over 11 million.

Following this, World News reports have covered the progress and spread of the Virus daily, including the growing numbers infected and growing death toll. The latest numbers are 40,000 infected and 900 deaths in mainland China. 310 cases have been reported across 24 other countries and two deaths outside China, involving 2 people who had visited the Wuhan, the capital city of the Hubei Province of China.

Coronavirus Symptoms and Prognosis

The symptoms of coronavirus are often mild – including runny noses, headaches, coughs and fevers. In some cases they lead to more serious respiratory tract illness including pneumonia and bronchitis. These can be particularly dangerous in older patients, or people who have existing health conditions, and this appears to be the case with this current novel coronavirus. On February 5, Chinese health officials reported that two-thirds of the people who have died from coronavirus were men, more than 80 per cent were over 60 years old and they typically had pre-existing health conditions such as diabetes or cardiovascular disease.

Travellers Visiting China

UK Nationals and travellers visiting Wuhan City, the Hubei Province of China and other specified areas and in China have been advised by the UK government to leave China and return home. The UK Government offered repatriation flights and quarantine facilities on return to the UK for those in Wuhan City. Others returning home to the UK have been screened on route with temperature checks and told to 'self-quarantine' once home and to stay indoors, avoiding contact with other people. They are to call NHS 111 to tell them of their recent travel and to follow this advice even if there are no symptoms of the virus. What this means in practice is a period of 'self-quarantine', staying at home for 14 days after arriving from Wuhan or Hubei Province and other specified areas. Individuals have been advised that they should not go to work, school or public areas. They should also try to avoid having visitors to the home, but it's OK for friends, family or delivery drivers to drop off food.

Further Travel Advice from the CMO and Royal Mail Group

The UK Chief Medical Officers are now advising anyone who has travelled to the UK from mainland China, Thailand, Japan, Republic of Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia or Macau in the last 14 days and is experiencing cough or fever or shortness of breath, to stay indoors and call NHS 111, even if symptoms are mild. These areas have been identified because of the volume of air travel from affected areas, understanding of other travel routes and number of reported cases. This list will be kept under review. Advice for travellers from Wuhan and Hubei Province remains unchanged.

Royal Mail Group have advised all Managers that if any staff member has returned from the affected areas listed above they should speak to their line manager before returning to work. Based on the latest information from Public Health England, Royal Mail Group Safety, Health & Environment Business Partners will advise managers accordingly.

Royal Mail Group have added that - In the interests of employee health they strongly recommend that employees do not travel to China and also review the latest travel advice from Public Health England before any travel likely to take them to designated areas of coronavirus high risk.

Royal Mail Group add that they will continue to take the wellbeing of our employees extremely seriously, monitoring the situation closely, monitoring information published by the Chinese authorities, World Health Organisation, Public Health England, Health Protection Agency and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office - and will act on PHE advice which is updated daily and in the meantime will continue to keep their guidance, policies and procedures up to date, sharing regular updates and information.

CWU Royal Mail Group Members Returning From China

A number of ASRs raised with the Health, Safety & Environment Department the fact that we had a number of members visiting China in the Province identified as the source of the virus and that there were obvious concerns firstly regarding the risk of those individuals returning and infecting others at work if symptoms and quarantine advice was ignored and secondly the impact on the individuals if they followed the self-quarantine advice. Discussions with the Royal Mail Head of Health took place and a small number of individuals were identified as currently visiting China and about to return to the UK. Contact was made with all individuals and Royal Mail has agreed to adopt a supportive policy for these members at this time of a health emergency, offering support and advice in respect of the 14-day 'self-quarantine' period, as advised by the government (through the Health Protection Agency, Public Health England and NHS, etc.), on return to the UK before returning to work and finally to ensure that the individuals suffer no loss or personal detriment.

The Two Most Frequently Asked Questions:

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

Since the Coronavirus Outbreak in China, this has been the most frequently asked question from CWU Members, Reps and Customers. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has said: It is safe to handle parcels from China. People receiving packages are not at risk of contracting the Coronavirus. From experience with other coronaviruses, the WHO knows that these types of viruses don't survive long on objects, such as letters or packages. Additionally at present the information from Public Health England (PHE), with whom Royal Mail Group are working closely with, is that 'the risk of Coronavirus transmitting to people from the surfaces of things such as parcels and packages is low.'

Royal Mail Group continue to reiterate the message from the UK's Chief Medical Officer, PHE and NHS that good work practices, including good hand hygiene, washing regularly with soap and water and the use of gloves, where required is the best defence against the risk of virus infections.

Disposable gloves are available to Royal Mail employee on request through their line manager and the gloves are a recommended additional health precaution. Antiseptic Wipes are also available on request.

"How long does Coronavirus survive on surfaces?"

Information from Public Health England is that the risk of people being infected with Coronavirus from a surface is low and the virus may survive a few hours. Simple disinfectants can kill the virus making it no longer possible to infect people. As with all mail handling and all other roles, good hand and personal hygiene should be maintained to minimise the risk of any infection, such as 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. Managers have been asked as part of good hygiene and 'housekeeping' to remind employees of the availability of antiseptic wipes for handheld shared items such as PDAs, finger scanners, multi-use keyboards, etc. ensuring the Office has an adequate supply of wipes.

Royal Mail Group continue to reiterate the message from the UK's Chief Medical Officer, PHE and NHS that good work practices, including good hand hygiene, washing regularly with soap and water and the use of gloves, where required is the best defence against the risk of virus infections. Disposable gloves are available to Royal Mail employee on request through their line manager and are the gloves are a recommended additional health precaution. Antiseptic Wipes are also available on request.

Remember - Maintain Good Basic Hand Hygiene

- The WHO, PHE, 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 or wipes and gloves when working as an added barrier precaution.
- Disposable gloves are available to Royal Mail employees on request through their line manager and the gloves are a recommended additional health precaution.
- Antiseptic Sanitising Wipes are available to Royal Mail employees for wiping handheld shared items such as PDAs, finger scanners and multi-use keyboards, etc. also as a recommended additional health precaution. Managers have been asked to ensure Offices have an adequate supply of wipes.

Conclusion

While the number of cases in China is still going up, other countries have not seen the same level of transmission. Cases in the UK have risen to 8. So far, 27 nations have caught the virus before it became a larger outbreak and have so far limited the numbers and prevented it getting a foothold in the general community to date but global health security is only as strong as the world's weakest link. At this stage we don't know if it will spread worldwide or disappear. In the mean time we all need to maintain basic hygiene rules and follow Health Agencies advice.

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

Coronavirus – Latest Advice

We take the wellbeing of our employees extremely seriously. We are following the situation with the coronavirus 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, World Health Organisation, Public Health England and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. If there are any changes or updates to how this guidance effects our policy and procedures we will issue updates through the intranet and directly to the SHE team

One frequently asked question is:

HOW LONG DOES THE VIRUS SURVIVE ON SURFACES?

It is still not known how long the 2019-nCoV virus survives on surfaces, information currently available consistently suggests the virus may survive a few hours. Simple disinfectants can kill the virus making it no longer possible to infect people.

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. The [Flu poster](#) can be used to raise the profile of good hygiene in your unit.

As part of good hygiene and ‘housekeeping’ please remind your teams of the availability of antiseptic wipes for handheld shared items such as PDAs, finger scanners and also multi-use keyboards ensuring you have an adequate supply of wipes.

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.

Travel advice

The UK Chief Medical Officers are advising anyone who has travelled to the UK from mainland China, Thailand, Japan, Republic of Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia or Macau in the last 14 days and is experiencing cough or fever or shortness of breath, to stay indoors and call NHS 111, even if symptoms are mild.

These areas have been identified because of the volume of air travel from affected areas, understanding of other travel routes and number of reported cases. This list will be kept under review. Advice for travellers from Wuhan and Hubei Province remains unchanged.

If you or any of your team members have returned from the affected areas listed above they should speak to their line manager before returning to work. Based on the latest information from Public Health England our Safety, Health & Environment Business Partners will advise managers accordingly.

In the interests of employee health we strongly recommend that colleagues on personal visits do not travel to China and also review the latest travel advice from Public Health England before any travel likely to take them to designated areas of higher risk.

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 and in the meantime continue to share regular updates and information.

Regards

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Royal Mail Group Safety Health and Environment Engagement Manager