Staff Information and Advice
COVID–19 Enhanced Response

30 March 2020 v1
Introduction
Information for staff

We are facing unprecedented and challenging times, with updates and changes for us both as the national public health institute and an employer (as well as parents, children and community members) coming almost daily.

Our management of the response to the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak is our overriding business priority for the weeks and months to come. We are now operating as if we are in a major incident. This means that – with the exception of our people working in our patient-facing core services (including Screening, Microbiology and Health Protection divisions) - all other roles and responsibilities across the organisation must now be mobilised to support this priority.

We are making decisions as to which Screening programmes will continue to run and we are in discussions with Welsh Government. This situation is very fluid and we will share more information when we have it.

It is essential we all look after ourselves during this unprecedented period, we have included more information on wellbeing and links to support services – please use them.
Keeping you informed

What we’re doing

Our contact centre arrangements have changed significantly over the past two weeks and is supported by staff throughout Wales, with three main clusters in Cardiff (Capital Quarter 2), Swansea (Matrix House) and Mold (Preswylfa). The role of the Centre and the roles within it may change pending global/national guidance.

Daily briefings are being issued by internal email each weekday afternoon to all colleagues. In addition to this, colleagues have submitted a number of queries via the rota cell, their line managers and their Trades Union representatives – please submit yours here.

We will aim to keep this advice updated as much as possible and ask that you check the latest information on the staff intranet page as well as the general updates on the Public Health Wales website:
For ease of navigation, we have split this guidance into that which is helpful for all staff and that which is specific for those working in different roles/supporting the enhanced response to the outbreak.

Information for all colleagues

Additional information for colleagues directly supporting the enhanced response
Information for all colleagues

- If you become unwell
- Wellbeing and safety
- Training and events
- School Closures
- Working from home
- Overseas travel
- Helping each other
If you become unwell
If you become unwell

Your wellbeing

Your wellbeing is paramount and the guidance below reflects the most up-to-date information for the public. We each have a role as NHS employees, community members, parents and family members to do what we can to prevent and delay the spread of infection. This guidance will be updated regularly.

If you live with others and have a new persistent cough and/or a fever or you live with anyone who does, stay at home and self isolate for 14 days, or 7 days if you live alone (click here for more information)

If you think you may have COVID-19, use the NHS Wales Symptom Tracker (click here) - only call 111 if symptoms worsen and/or you cannot cope at home

If you are over 70 or in a vulnerable group, please adhere to guidance on social distancing (click here for more information)
Self-isolation
Your wellbeing and safety

It has been agreed that any self-isolation absence (whether with symptoms or without), which is taken following UK/Welsh Government advice in the interests of infection control, will be treated as medical exclusion. In these circumstances, colleagues will not be required to provide a Fit Note as the absence is considered authorised with full pay.

Absence as a result of coronavirus will not count towards the prompts outlined in the Managing Attendance at Work policy and employees will be paid in full.

Any planned annual leave which coincides with this period of self-isolation will be reinstated.

Where a period of exclusion is applied, this must be recorded both on the Return to Work form and recorded in ESR using the Special Leave Increasing Balance option and selecting the Infection Prevention category.

Click here for guidance from UK charity Mind on self-isolation and coping with the outbreak
Your wellbeing and safety
General advice

Your wellbeing and safety

We encourage you all to take basic hygiene precautions such as effective and frequent hand-washing, avoiding travel to affected areas and/or coming into contact with infected or potentially infected people.

Colleagues working after 7pm and/or before 7am and using public transport should not put their safety at risk and should consider using taxis to travel to/from train stations/home. This will be reimbursed but we ask colleagues share where feasible.

Staff are encouraged to wash hands thoroughly and regularly, especially:

• when you get to work or arrive home
• after you blow your nose, cough or sneeze
• before you eat or handle food

You should wash your hands for 20 seconds, using soap and water or hand sanitiser.
Guidance for pregnant colleagues

Your wellbeing and safety

As at Monday 16 March 2020, pregnant women are advised against unnecessary social contact and are considered to be an ‘at risk’ group. They are advised to:

• Avoid contact with someone who is displaying symptoms of coronavirus. These symptoms include high temperature and/or new and continuous cough;

• Avoid non-essential use of public transport, varying your travel times to avoid rush hour, when possible;
  Work from home, where possible. Your employer should support you to do this

• Avoid large gatherings, and gatherings in smaller public spaces such as pubs, cinemas, restaurants, theatres, bars, clubs

• Avoid gatherings with friends and family. Keep in touch using remote technology such as phone, internet, and social media

• Use telephone or online services to contact your GP or other essential services

We advise pregnant colleagues to follow the latest advice from RCOG, local health boards and, importantly, to seek guidance from their midwife/consultant who will be most familiar with their individual pregnancies.
Vulnerable groups in critical roles

What adjustments may be required?

• For colleagues in this category, the NHS will support staff to stay well and at work. Managers should make adjustments to enable this wherever possible. Adjustments may include moving to a lower-risk area, travelling to work in a different way, or working remotely.

• Action to be taken for staff will depend upon their condition and how stable it is. Where a condition is unstable and there may be an increased risk to an individual, conversations should take place with those staff about what steps need to be taken to keep them safe, and specialist advice taken as required. In addition, they may wish to seek support from People and OD or Occupational Health, or both.

• Where staff in this category have to be redeployed or work from home, consideration should be given to what duties they can continue to carry out, and what support they will need to do this.
Vulnerable groups in critical roles

Risk assessment

• Assistance should be provided to those staff who might be working or deployed in higher-risk areas by:
  o ensuring they are aware of the UK Government guidance and how they can protect themselves
  o talking to them about their role, how they travel to work, usual environment and proximity to other colleagues and/or service users, and any other elements which may put them at greater risk
  o discussing and developing a plan to implement any reasonable adjustments where required, for example redeployment into less high-risk areas, reduced travel, working from home
  o seeking further advice from occupational health in the first instance, and, where required, further consultation with their specialist doctor regarding their underlying condition in order to optimise their condition where possible
  o signposting to further areas of support such as our employment assistance programme (provided by Care First).

• In these unprecedented times, our people more than ever will be making every effort to care for the population of Wales, and we must equal that with our care for them.
Vulnerable groups in critical roles
Risk assessment

• In line with current UK Government guidance, we have developed a risk assessment form for managers and staff to help in making essential decisions on arrangements for colleagues who are:

  1. In a group identified as vulnerable/at risk, and
  2. Working in a business critical role or function

• Managers - Please complete this risk assessment if you have an employee in a business critical function who may be at risk/vulnerable as set out in UK Government guidance published 16 March 2020.

• For staff who are in any of the at risk groups but are not in a business critical function, they should work from home wherever possible.
We understand that some of you have real concerns about catching COVID-19, while others may have worries about elderly relatives or those with underlying health conditions.

Please be reminded that the Care First employee assistance programme is available for advice and support for staff, online and via a free-phone number 0800 174319, 24 hours a day.

Please also access the Employee Wellbeing pages which provide a range of tools which you may find helpful.

A NHS Wales Staff Wellbeing COVID-19 Resource has also been developed by HEIW in partnership with staff health and wellbeing leads across NHS Wales and Trade Union partners.
Staff networks

Working together, with trust and respect, to make a difference

We understand that colleagues may have questions or concerns in relation to their particular circumstances or their lives in general. Whilst we will make every effort to answer queries through managers, Trade Union representatives and through the ‘ask a question’ forum, we also understand that you may want to link in with peers who may be able to offer further support.

We have staff networks within Public Health Wales including Enfys (LGBT+), We Care (Carers), BAME, Women’s and Disabled Staff – please connect with them.
Violence and aggression

Hate crimes

We are aware of a number of reports of acts of hate happening in the community against people of Chinese or Asian origin since the outbreak began. This is a criminal offence and should be reported to the police immediately.

Colleagues of Chinese or Asian origin who have experienced such abuse should report it to the police and seek support/counselling through any services they recommend/signpost to but should also consider utilising the Employee Assistance Programme, open 24/7. Colleagues should also speak to their Line Managers as soon as possible if they are concerned this may happen, and consider what additional actions could be taken to safeguard them in and out of work. Advice can also be sought from our BAME Staff Network and Diversity and Inclusion Manager, as well as our Trade Union partners.

Please be assured that these concerns are taken seriously.
Training and events
Training and events
A change to business as usual

The OD and Learning team have postponed all centrally-commissioned learning and development events. As at Wednesday 25th March, the team have agreed with our Professional Lead for Health and Safety that Fire Safety Awareness (which is normally completed in a classroom setting) should be done via the e-learning certification ‘000 NHS Wales Fire Safety Awareness Level One’. Colleagues learning via this route must always ensure they are aware of local alarm and evacuation procedures.

ESR can be accessed off the network either through this link or by downloading the ‘My ESR’ from your app store. Guidance for accessing e-learning is here, please ignore the line stating Fire Safety shouldn’t be completed this way for now!

In line with the latest guidance on social distancing, all non-critical work events, e.g. meetings, conferences, should be postponed/cancelled with immediate effect. Managers are also urged to check whether any employees are due to attend any large external events e.g. training courses, conferences and cancel/postpone attendance.
Working from home
Working from home
Reducing the risk to ourselves and others

• The latest advice from the UK government is to work from home wherever feasible. Firstly, we appreciate not all colleagues can work from home, particularly those in patient-facing or other business critical roles. Secondly, our network will not be able to support every colleague with remote access and as such, we are communicating with managers/business continuity leads to ensure business critical roles have priority access.

• Colleagues who are unable to work from home but are asked not to come into the workplace are assured that they will be paid in full. You may consider supporting community efforts (whilst staying safe and following public guidance on social distancing) or you can volunteer for our rotas.

• Please appreciate this situation is changing daily and often rapidly so, if not working and asked not to come in, you should remain on standby.

Please continue to follow the general advice and guidance on wellbeing when home working.
Business critical roles

Further detail

Appreciating COVID-19 is our priority, we recognise the following parts of the organisation as critical/having critical roles:

• Colleagues directly delivering the enhanced response to COVID-19: Health Protection, Microbiology, the COVID-19 contact centre and various associated roles

• Those supporting the wider NHS through functions such as Microbiology and Local Public Health Teams

• Enabling functions who ensure the above teams can work effectively, e.g. Communications, Estates, Finance, People and Organisational Development, IT and Informatics

Roles within these parts of the organisation may be more critical than others, and your line manager can link how your role fits into the COVID-19 response and broader Business Continuity arrangements.
If your role is not considered business critical, you can stay home and await further instructions. If you are not sure if your role is business critical please discuss with your line manager.

As mentioned, it is likely that we will have to prioritise remote access for colleagues with responsibilities critical to the enhanced response/remaining business priorities. This may mean that colleagues with equipment are unable to access the network.

All directorates, divisions and teams should be referring to their Business Continuity Plans not only to identify these roles, but to consider what work may be done offline by other team members. Consider:

**ESR** – use the ESR app on your phones to complete statutory and mandatory training – even if not due for some time! Search My ESR on your smartphones

**Save your My Contribution/appraisal forms and start preparing for your annual review**

**Update draft operating procedures/policies that can be saved to a desktop or undertake research**

**Carry out CPD and online training -** [https://www.futurelearn.com/courses](https://www.futurelearn.com/courses) or [learn Welsh!](https://www.futurelearn.com/courses)!
The move to home working is enabling us to continue to deliver our critical functions whilst responding to COVID-19, wherever such working arrangements can be accommodated.

Some of our activities cannot be done from home and we are grateful to our colleagues who continue to work in these front line roles. For many of us though, our ways of working and our working patterns will now change significantly.

For home working to be effective, there are a number of things we can do to ensure that individuals continue to be effectively supported whilst undertaking their roles from a different location and that vital work continues to be undertaken.

Acas have produced a comprehensive schedule of advice and guidance, Working from Home which covers areas such as Health and Safety, equipment and technology, and wider employment matters.

COVID 19: Staff Information
**Working from home**

**Support and advice**

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) have published a series of tips, *Getting the most from remote working* which cover online meetings, managing remote teams and working remotely.

Working from home can be challenging and given the temporary but potentially significant duration of the changes in the national situation it is important that individuals are supported to look after their health and well-being.

It is vital that we all keep in touch with each other and we are asking managers to ensure that colleagues are contacted at least every two days to ensure that everyone is doing OK.

It is also important to establish a routine. If you have been trained as a Call Taker, Call Advisor or Contact Tracer to help support our response to COVID-19 then this could include working in the contact centre on set days or for certain shifts each week. This will help us to staff the rotas and keep in touch, and help you maintain some sort of weekly work routine.
Working from home
Support and advice

‘Mind’ have produced a range of resources and tips on their website under the heading Coronavirus and your wellbeing, which include how to plan and prepare for working from home or staying indoors.

Our colleagues in Cardiff and Vale UHB have also published some helpful materials for young people which you may find useful to help build a family-friendly routine in many of your households.

Managers and supervisors need to keep in touch with colleagues and any questions or concerns need to raised with managers as would be the case in ordinary circumstances.
Working from Home
Support and advice

General advice for all:
• Establish a routine, and when work is over, be sure you switch off
• Make it feel like you are going to work, set up your work space thinking about space, trip hazards, position, etc.
• Work offline when you can and use VPN occasionally to download/upload information
• Think about how many emails you send and who you cc into emails. Please keep both to a minimum
• Get fresh air, exercise once a day, such as going for a walk (avoid contact with others and follow social distancing rules)
• Catch up with friends – perhaps you could try a video call in the evening with a family member or friend?
• Eat well. Get enough sleep.
• Ask for support from your manager

Tips for Managers:
• Be flexible
• Trust your team
• Ensure you have spoken with each of the people who report to you, at least every other day
• Check with staff that their working environment is suitable and they have the equipment they need
• Make it clear what is expected of your team and also how they can get support from you and the organisation
• The situation can change quickly. If staff are at home, we may need to contact them so make sure all mobile numbers are up to date
• Make sure staff have the practical and emotional support that they need
• Keep up the rhythm of 1-1 and team meetings
• Foster social relationships, e.g. have a virtual team chat in an evening which is purely social

COVID 19: Staff Information
Managers - Remember, your team want to hear from you about anything and everything!

Hold informal sessions with your team as often as you can – give updates and ask for feedback.

Get regular feedback from your team on what they want to know, ‘what can I tell you?’, ‘what do you need to know?’

Consider the use of online channels (Skype, Slack, Zoom, etc.) to start sharing info and give your team a chance to talk and ask questions.

Check in with the team and seek feedback, just one or two questions will do ‘How was work for you this week?’

Ask about what people are working on and share what’s on your plate.

Be clear in your communication – When we’re not face to face some of the non-verbal and more subtle cues can be missed. Take care to be clear and concise, and pay attention.
School Closures
School and Childcare Closures

Critical workers

- Please see UK Government advice for up to date information regarding school closures, published 19 March 2020.

- We understand that school closures/unavailability of planned childcare on this scale and for this long are unprecedented and an additional concern for parents and other carers in Public Health Wales.

- UK Government advice now confirms that ‘If your work is critical to the COVID-19 response, and you cannot keep your child safe at home then your children will be prioritised for education provision’.

- Critical workers in Health and Social Care have been confirmed to include doctors, nurses, midwives, paramedics, social workers, care workers, and other frontline health and social care staff including volunteers; and the support and specialist staff required to maintain the UK’s health and social care sector.
• All Public Health Wales staff are NHS employees and should be considered key/critical workers needed to help with the COVID-19 response.
• Therefore, we would encourage staff to please take up any childcare provision offered by the local authority wherever possible.
• We appreciate that parents cannot currently rely upon those who are advised to be in the more stringent social distancing category such as grandparents, friends, or family members with underlying conditions. This means we may not be able to call on our usual support networks for extra help at this time.
• Please discuss your children being looked after by your partner or co-parent (if you have one) and if they are not also classed as a key/critical worker.
• Discuss with other support networks that may be available to you. We recognise that finding alternative childcare may pose a particular issue for those staff who are single parents.
School and Childcare Closures

Working flexibly, working together

• Consider whether you need to make use of ‘emergency carers and dependants leave’ in the short term to make arrangements for alternative childcare.

• If you cannot attend work in line with your usual working arrangements, please consider how you can work flexibly. All managers are encouraged to think practically about what can be done and when. Our response to COVID-19 is our overriding business priority and we’re all working very differently to support the response and other remaining business critical work.

• Where schools are providing children with digital lessons/work to complete at home with parents/carers, please speak to your manager about working a different pattern so you can balance your role as parent/carer and your work – working in a different way may also ease the pressure on our remote network.

• If you have older children or children who can play/learn whilst you work, work from home where possible - taking into account our need to prioritise remote network access for business critical roles/functions.
School and Childcare Closures
Working flexibly, working together

• You will not be expected to take annual leave to cover childcare. However, please make all reasonable efforts to make yourself available for work. This may involve working outside of your normal working pattern.

• If you wish to take any period of annual leave, please agree and book it in the usual way.

• Please do not lose sight of the general public health advice on social distancing – go for quiet walks, still have outside safe play at home where possible.
Overseas travel
For colleagues travelling to or from overseas
Your safety and wellbeing

- Individuals who for reasons other than work, intend to travel to affected countries in the next three months or have travelled to/transited through any of the affected countries should notify your line manager as soon as possible.

- Line managers should contact the team managing the enhanced response for advice, who will forward details to the Consultant on duty. Please email PHW_Silver@wales.nhs.uk using the subject line ‘Coronavirus advice for managers’. If urgent, managers can call 0300 00 300 32. Colleagues may be referred to Occupational Health for advice before returning to work.

- Individuals should consult the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) website for up to date travel advice before making any travel arrangements https://www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-advice-novel-coronavirus#contents
Working together, with trust and respect, to make a difference
Supporting each other
It’s what makes us us!

It is essential that we provide a sufficient response to the current situation and that we are adequately prepared to increase and adapt that response as the landscape surrounding the outbreak changes by the day.

Peer support is imperative - including showing care for/backfilling colleagues who may be supporting the enhanced response - and staff wellbeing remains a priority.

Keep yourselves well by following the advice we’ve given as well as the latest public advice

- Encourage one another to take regular breaks where possible
- When possible, take lunch breaks with a colleague(s)
- Take turns to make drinks for one another
- Say thank you! Everyone is working incredibly hard, showing appreciation will boost morale
- You could set alarms to remember to stand up or do some desk exercises together
- Familiarise yourself with the symptoms of stress, often you will notice them in someone else before yourself. You could gently let them know and ask how you can help
Information for colleagues
supporting the enhanced response

Wellbeing and safety
Leave, pay and expenses
Helping each other
Your wellbeing and safety
As noted, we are operating an enhanced response to the COVID-19 outbreak and are working in line with procedures for major incidents. All staff, except those in patient-facing services, are being mobilised to support this response or provide support to those who are, by picking up different or additional responsibilities.

It is as important as ever that we all take responsibility for our wellbeing and safety.

Please follow the advice/guidance here and speak to your manager if you have any concerns.

**GENERAL ADVICE FOR ALL**

- Take regular screen breaks
- Eat a healthy balanced diet and avoid eating at your desk
- Try to keep to your usual exercise routine
- Try to mix up sitting and standing at your desk. If possible, stand for twenty minutes every hour
- If you are unable to stand/move regularly, try doing some simple desk exercises to help you feel more comfortable
- Learning to breathe more deeply can help you feel calmer
- Try to keep your desk space clutter free and clean
- Need help? Ask for it - speak to your manager or the TIM on duty if your workload is becoming difficult to manage.
Taking breaks/time out

Your wellbeing and safety

Statutory guidance applies for taking breaks from the workplace – at least 20 minutes for every continuous 6 hours worked, however we want you to take breaks as frequently as you need. All colleagues are responsible for making sure they take breaks, managers/supervisors must ensure colleagues are able to take full breaks.

We recommend breaks are not taken at your desk: get some fresh air if possible, take lunch with a colleague but please adhere to guidance on social distancing.
Further support
We appreciate this is tough…

We advise any colleagues supporting our response to take a few minutes (either with a colleague or on their own if preferred) if they feel they need to reflect on a call or query. Further information is available via the Care First and Employee Wellbeing pages [here](#).

- Speak to a colleague or the supervisor on duty if you feel overwhelmed/unwell
- Take a break as soon as possible and get some fresh air/water
- Do some gentle breathing exercises to help you relax
Annual leave, pay and expenses
Information for staff
Leave and pay

We are not routinely asking colleagues to postpone or cancel approved annual leave, however, if you have annual leave scheduled but are asked and able to postpone to help support our response, all leave/TOIL cancelled can be carried forward into the next operational year.

Additional hours can be taken as time off in lieu (TOIL) or claimed as overtime. All those involved in the enhanced response are encouraged to ensure a sensible balance is struck between home life and work life. For that reason, we would encourage staff to take TOIL wherever possible and any member of staff may request to take TOIL as an alternative to overtime payments. All staff will be paid for any additional hours worked at their normal plain time rate until they have exceeded the whole time equivalent (usually 37.5 hours per week).

Full details, including details of the Working Time Regulations, are available online, http://howis.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/888/news/64829
Information for staff
Expenses

• Journeys made over and above usual to and from the workplace to support the enhanced response can be claimed at the normal mileage rate/cost of standard class travel (e.g. additional weekend shifts). Claims, including those over and above normal travel rates should be made in the usual way – full details can be found online:

• http://howis.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/888/news/64829

• Please retain and present all receipts. Managers should cross-reference with overtime sheets.
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