

## Coronavirus (COVID-19) – Advice and guidance for staff and managers – Leeds City Council

1 Version 7- information correct as of Sunday 15th March 2020 Version 7

Leeds City Council - COVID-19: – Advice for all employees

Version 7 - information correct as of 15 March 2020 19.00 (always check InSite for latest version). This version has been simplified in the light of national guidance and to ensure that we take a consistent approach across the organisation.

Whilst this guidance is extensive, if you have any concerns or questions please ask your manager or you can contact HR/H&S Business Partners for workplace advice. Contact [Chris.Ingham@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:Chris.Ingham@leeds.gov.uk) for any urgent and/or cross council matters.

### Key messages

Leeds is as well prepared as it can be for this type of outbreak, with well-developed plans and good partnership arrangements, although the situation is changing rapidly and presenting new challenges. LCC will follow the latest government advice and our plans and arrangements are being reviewed and communicated regularly.

We recognise that we may have to re-prioritise work to ensure key council services are maintained. We are working with Trade Union colleagues on how staff could work more flexibly if required, whilst safeguarding the health & wellbeing of our workforce and promoting communications and staff engagement.

### Key Advice

The latest advice is for anyone who has a continuous cough and/or high temperature to self-isolate for 7 days. You do not need to contact 111 during this time unless you have concerns about the severity of your symptoms or you are not getting better.

If someone in your household has to self-isolate, but you do not have any symptoms however mild, you can go about your business including work as normal.

If you have an underlying medical condition, or live or care for someone who has:

The Government states that people with certain underlying conditions – e.g. those who are immunosuppressed, have cancer, diabetes, or respiratory problems - may have complications arising from COVID-19. It is important that you let your manager know if you have one of these underlying conditions so that we can plan properly.

This is our current position: • If someone has an underlying condition and can work from home effectively this will be supported – please inform your manager and discuss any practical arrangements • If someone has concerns about their underlying condition and their role does not allow them to work from home, then they should discuss this with their manager. The manager will then seek advice from the council's Occupational Health Service.

We also recognise that the current situation may raise anxiety levels, especially if someone has existing mental health issues, including hygiene related OCD. So speak to your manager.

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Whilst most current cases appear to be mild, it is important to follow good hygiene practices - regular hand washing, catching sneezes, binning tissues and regularly cleaning your immediate work area are all good precautionary measures.

Please only follow trusted advice at [gov.uk/coronavirus](https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus) and sign up to government alerts if possible <https://www.gov.uk/email-signup/confirm?link=%2Fgovernment%2Ftopicalevents%2Fcoronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response>

### Key Facts about the Virus

Please see <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/> for all the key facts about COVID19. The key things to note are:

☑ Main symptoms - a new continuous cough and high temperature; ☑ Spread - in the same way as colds/flu – directly from sneezes or by touching surfaces; ☑ Severity – it is more severe in people with weakened immune systems, older people and those with long-term conditions like diabetes, cancer and respiratory problems;

Being proactive

All Staff:

☒ Self-isolate for 7 days if you have a new continuous cough and/or a high temperature; ☒ Regular hand hygiene and cleaning of frequently-touched surfaces will help to reduce the risk of infection. Washing hands thoroughly with hot water and soap should always be the first choice. Use tissues when sneezing or coughing, and always throw them away in a bin; ☒ If you would be able to work from home, check you have all the right equipment and test it now. If your role would be able to be done from home, but there are any barriers e.g. no broadband or particular domestic situations, then speak to your manager.

Managers:

- Record all Special Leave and sickness absence related to COVID-19 as soon as possible to help provide a real-time overview;
- Speak to any employees who have concerns about the impact of the virus on them due to underlying health conditions or because they live with or care for someone who has. See the FAQ on this below;
- Consider whether any stress risk assessments need to be reviewed in the current context;
- Ask staff, who can do, to ensure they are prepared to work from home if required;
- Encourage regular handwashing throughout the day.
- Review service Business Continuity Plans e.g. consider what you might do if staff absences increase; what work you would prioritise; what non-essential work would you stop; how else might you work etc.
- Encourage ideas and solutions from employees as to how services can be kept running;
- Review health and safety risks with your Health and Safety Advisers and Trade Union colleagues to consider any additional or alternative protective measures.

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Some Frequently Asked Questions

As you will appreciate, this is a fast-moving situation and we would advise all colleagues to keep up to date with the latest government and LCC advice. You can find key links at the end of this document. We have also prepared the FAQs below to help you better understand what the virus may or may not mean in terms of you and your work at Leeds City Council.

Personal protection

a) I have an underlying medical condition, or live or care for someone who has, and I am worried about catching this virus.

Please see the answer above within the Key Advice section on page 1.

b) Is LCC distributing supplies of anti-microbial sanitisers and disinfectant surface wipes?

Hand washing with hot water and soap is the most effective means of maintaining personal hygiene.

It is recognised that in some roles this is not always possible. Shortages of hand sanitiser are expected and these services should work with health and safety colleagues to find alternative safe methods of work. We will prioritise any supplies that do come available to key, public facing services.

The government is prioritising supplies to NHS and Care Staff.

Enquiries and orders are being co-ordinated centrally in LCC. Please contact Helen.Darby@leeds.gov.uk as she is coordinating this with colleagues in CEL and Procurement.

c) What precautions should I take if I use shared desks and computer equipment?

When you arrive for work, clean the desk and any shared equipment such as the keyboard, mouse etc and repeat when you leave. Do not eat at your desk.

If supplies of disinfectant wipes become limited, and you are concerned about hot desking, please plug the laptop into the monitor and use your own keyboard and mouse. Remember to take regular breaks, stop working if you feel any pain and inform your manager. Always use specialist equipment if required to do so.

d) Should I wear a facemask to protect myself from infection?

In line with government advice, LCC is not currently supporting the routine wearing of facemasks. There is very little evidence of widespread benefit from the use of facemasks outside of clinical settings, and other emergency situations and we have a central reserve currently to cover this. Facemasks must be worn correctly, changed frequently, removed properly and disposed of safely in order to be effective.

## Employment Matters

e) If I have to self-isolate, does this go on my sickness record/how is it recorded?

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Self-isolation for at least 7 days is required if you have a new, continuous cough and/or high temperature or have otherwise been told to do so. Do not call 111, present at your GP surgery or hospital, unless you have serious health issues when you should call 111 or 999 as appropriate.

If you need to self-isolate, telephone your manager who will record this ASAP. You may be able to work from home.

If someone is not well enough to work – this is classed as sickness absence and should be recorded under the special COVID-19 category. This will not count towards triggers/targets.

If someone either has symptoms but ordinarily would continue to work or has no symptoms but has been told to self-isolate, this is NOT classed as sickness. People should still self-isolate and work remotely if possible. This is recorded as Special Leave under the two new categories of self-isolation.

If they have no reason to self-isolate they should attend work as normal.

f) What if I am a primary carer/parent and need to care for someone who has to self-isolate?

Normal Special Leave provisions apply and we will relax some of the conditions around number of days per occasion. This will be considered at CLT level if all schools have to close, for example.

g) Annual leave

Managers are asked to be flexible regarding requests to carry over leave into the new financial year. This could happen when an employee cannot go on their holiday due to travel restrictions, or where an employee cannot take leave due to service pressures.

## The Workplace

### h) Precautions

Consider sensible precautions which may include: increasing the frequency of cleaning of hand contact surfaces; encourage regular handwashing throughout the day; read the specific guidance as it relates to your work e.g. community care, residential and educational settings; cleaning; transport.

### i) What if someone becomes unwell at work?

If someone feels unwell with COVID-19 symptoms in the workplace they should: • Go home, avoiding public transport and taxis and self-isolate for 7 days. Whilst making arrangements to go home they should keep at least 2m away from others and avoid touching anything and use a separate bathroom from others, if possible. • Cough or sneeze into a tissue and put it in a bin, or if they do not have tissues, cough and sneeze into the crook of their elbow. • If they feel seriously ill someone should call 999.

### j) What if someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 has been in work?

There are no restrictions or special control measures required, in particular there is no need to close the workplace or send other staff home at this point – unless advised by a health professional.

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Contacts are not considered cases and if they are well, they are very unlikely to have spread the infection to others.

As a precautionary measure, you should arrange for the cleaning of hand-contact surfaces in the area where the person has visited – which is good practice in terms of other more common viruses.

Public areas where a symptomatic individual has passed through and spent minimal time in (such as corridors, but which are not visibly contaminated with body fluids, do not need to be specially cleaned and disinfected.

All waste that has been in contact with an individual with symptoms, including used tissues, and masks if used, should be double-bagged, tied and securely stored for 72 hours before disposal in the usual way.

k) Why are some employers and contractors who we work with taking different precautions to us?

This is their prerogative. LCC is following the national advice and guidance at all times. As a large local authority, it is important we follow this advice and don't send mixed messages to the public.

Sometimes what people see as additional protection, e.g. facemasks, can actually cause greater risk and concern if not used properly.

l) What practical advice is there for staff who are working from home?

DIS and HR have produced new guides for people working at home during COVID-19. DIS guidance  
HR guidance

Event management

m) I have organised an event. Can it go ahead and are there any special precautions?

In line with government guidance, Leeds City Council is not currently advising stopping or limiting public gatherings because of the coronavirus risk, however it may be appropriate in some circumstances to postpone an event e.g. staff engagement for business reasons if staff have to focus on delivering critical services.

As a large local authority, it is important we follow national advice and do not send mixed messages to the public. This is under constant review by the government.

If you have an event planned, speak to the h&s team to offer practical, precautionary advice. One of the key things you can do is contact delegates in advance and remind them not to attend if they have a high temperature and/or a continuous cough. Ensure rooms are well ventilated if possible.

As the government guidance is for events to continue at this time, we do not recommend giving refunds if people wish to cancel, unless they have self-isolate.

n) I am due to attend an event overseas – can I still go?

International school trips have been advised against and LCC will not approve them at this time in line with government advice.

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Employees will not be required to travel overseas for work and will be encouraged to use SKYPE, Webinars etc. In any case, Foreign Office advice must be followed.

Travel

o) What is the current advice for people returning to the UK from affected countries?

This is changing all the time, so it is always best to check for updated guidance if they have returned from abroad in the last 14 days. If it has been over 14 days since they returned and they are not showing any symptoms then they are unlikely to be suffering from COVID-19.

If the guidance advises them to self-isolate then people should stay at home, avoid contact with others and follow the advice above.