

Staying healthy and well while volunteering

31 March 2020

As the impact of COVID-19 (coronavirus) spreads across the country, many community groups and residents are looking out for one another and offering support to people who are vulnerable. You may want to support people who are self-isolating, especially people without nearby family, elderly people, and people with a disability or long-term health condition such as cancer, diabetes and chronic lung disease. You may also want to support those who are struggling to afford or access food.

Who should volunteer?

You can only provide support to others if you are under 70, you are well and have no symptoms such as a cough or high temperature (and nobody in your household does), you are not pregnant, and you do not have any long term health conditions that make you vulnerable to COVID-19 (coronavirus).

How can volunteers stay safe?

If you are volunteering or wish to help those around you it is important that you stay safe to protect yourself and those you are helping. Read and follow the government guidance on [how to help safely](#), and ensure you take the following important steps:

- If you or anyone in your household is showing symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19), you must stay at home and follow guidance for [households with possible coronavirus infection](#).
- Wash your hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially before and after you deliver any items.
- Try to support people who live close to you and avoid travelling longer distances.
- Stay at least two metres – three steps – away from others at all times. When making a delivery, place items outside doors and then step away. Follow government guidance on [social distancing](#).
- Try to limit the amount of time you spend outside your home by picking up essential items for others when you do your own shopping, or collect their medicines during the same trip, being mindful of the advice to [stay at home and away from others](#).
- Be careful about how you share personal information about yourself and other people.
- Don't take on too much – it is often better not to offer to help at all than to let someone down.
- Be careful about taking money from people to pay for shopping. It is better to have **no** money changing hands, and so those who are helped are asked to organise payment remotely with shops where possible. If this is not possible, write down details of any payments so that there is clear agreement. Please be aware that many people may be more vulnerable to fraud at this time.

Do volunteers need personal protective equipment?

For prevention of coronavirus, personal protective equipment (such as gloves and face masks) is only required for people who are:

- Providing close personal care to people with symptoms of COVID-19;
- Cleaning an area where a person with symptoms has recently been; or
- Entering a closed area with a group of people with symptoms of COVID-19.

Volunteers should not undertake these activities and therefore do not need to use personal protective equipment for protection against coronavirus, and/or coronavirus spread.

What can help your mental health and wellbeing

- **Connect with others** – stay in touch with friends and family via telephone, video calls or social media instead of meeting in person;
- **Look after your physical wellbeing** – try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, drink enough water, exercise inside where possible and outside once a day, and try to avoid smoking, alcohol and drugs;
- **Look after your sleep** – try to maintain regular sleeping patterns and keep good sleep hygiene practices – like avoiding screens before bed, cutting back on caffeine and creating a restful environment;
- **Try to manage difficult feelings** – try to focus on the things you can control, including where you get information from and actions to make yourself feel better prepared.
- **Manage your media and information intake** – try to limit the time you spend watching, reading, or listening to media coverage of the outbreak. It may help to only check the news at set times or limiting to a couple of checks a day.
- **Get the facts** – gather high-quality information that will help you to accurately determine your own or other people's risk of contracting coronavirus (COVID-19) so that you can take reasonable precautions. Find a credible source you can trust such as [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk), or the [NHS website](https://www.nhs.uk), and fact check information that you get from newsfeeds, social media or from other people. Think about how possibly inaccurate information could affect others too. Try not to share information without fact-checking against credible sources.
- **Think about your new daily routine** – try to engage in useful activities (such as cleaning, cooking or exercise) or meaningful activities (such as reading or calling a friend).
- **Do things you enjoy** – focussing on your favourite hobby, learning something new or simply taking time to relax indoors should give you some relief from anxious thoughts and feelings and can boost your mood.
- **Set goals** – think about things you want or need to do that you can still do at home. It could be watching a film, reading a book or learning something online.
- **Keep your mind active** – read, write, play games, do crossword puzzles, sudokus, jigsaws or drawing and painting.
- **Take time to relax and focus on the present** – this can help with difficult emotions, worries about the future, and can improve wellbeing. Relaxation techniques can also help some people to deal with feelings of anxiety.
- **If you can, once a day get outside, or bring nature in:** Spending time in green spaces can benefit both your mental and physical wellbeing. If you can't get outside much you can try to still get these positive effects by spending time with the windows open to let in fresh air, arranging space to sit and see a nice view (if possible) and get some natural sunlight, or get out into the garden if you can. Remember that [social distancing guidelines](#) enable you to go outside to exercise once a day as long as you keep two metres apart from others who are not members of your household group.

Other useful links

- Guidance on [how to help safely](#);
- Guidance on [mental health and wellbeing](#) aspects of coronavirus;
- Guidance on [staying at home and away from others](#);
- Guidance on [social distancing and for vulnerable people](#);
- Guidance on [shielding and protecting people](#) defined on medical grounds as extremely vulnerable;
- Guidance for [households with possible coronavirus infection](#);
- Guidance on how to look after your mental health ([Every Mind Matters](#)).

Please be aware that public health guidance on coronavirus (COVID-19) may change on a regular basis. Please refer www.gov.uk for the most up to date guidance.