General guidelines for working during coronavirus

This document was written on 17 March 2020 as internal guidance for VoiceAbility staff. We are now sharing it publicly in the hope that it might be of some assistance to others, especially advocacy organisations, and ultimately to people who rely on the support we all provide. It was written in good faith based on the best information available at a particular point in time. No liability is accepted for any adverse consequences of reliance upon it. We welcome feedback to CV19@voiceability.org

Key messages

• Staff must follow all NHS and Public Health England advice relating to staying at home and social distancing. Please only use these trusted sources of information.
• If you are well, arrangements will be made for you to work from home.
• Do not work if you are ill with a high temperature (over 37.8C) or a new persistent cough. You must self-isolate in accordance with government guidance. If you are ill, notify your manager as usual. You will get sick pay in line with our usual policy.
• If you have to self-isolate because someone in your household is ill but you are well, contact your manager to discuss. Usually arrangements will be made for you to work from home.
• If you are in a category which places you at increased risk if you were to contract coronavirus, please speak to your manager or regional HR Manager. Managers will then work with you to understand how we can best support you.

What to do

• Staff must follow all NHS and Public Health England advice relating to staying at home and social distancing. Staff who are in ‘at risk groups’ should be particularly stringent.
• Managers will be working with all staff to support them to move to home-based working, where at all possible.
• In line with our policies, all staff who are off sick will be paid from day one of their absence.

• You should only undertake visits to clients and in person meetings (whether with clients or professionals) where these are essential.

• Where possible, deliver advocacy by phone, email or video.

• If meeting people in person you must take the practical steps outlined in our ‘Visits guidance’ document (now available at voiceability.org/coronavirus).

• If you are involved in providing non-advocacy services, your manager will work with you to make decisions about what should continue at this time.

External links

Staying at home

Social distancing

At Risk Groups

If you feel unwell

You must self-isolate for at least seven days if you have a high temperature (over 37.8C) or a new persistent cough. You must not meet with clients, colleagues or go to work.

If someone in your household has either or both of these symptoms you also must self-isolate for 14 days. Contact your manager to discuss arrangements during this period.

If you do not feel well enough to work, then contact your manager using our usual absence reporting procedures. You do not need to contact 111. You will receive sick pay from day one of your absence in line with our Sick Pay policy.
What is social distancing?

We should now all exercise social distancing. This means:

- Work from home, where possible.
- Avoid contact with anyone who is displaying symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19). 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.
- Avoid large gatherings, and gatherings in smaller public spaces such as pubs, cinemas, restaurants, theatres, bars and 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.

Everyone should be trying to follow these measures as much as is pragmatic.

For those who are pregnant, over 70 or are in at-risk groups, we strongly advise you to follow the above measures as much as you can, and to significantly limit your in-person interaction with friends and family if possible.

Working practice

If you are an office-based staff member, then your manager will work with you to support a transition to home-based working if possible. You should still undertake essential advocacy visits unless you are self-isolating for any reason.

If you are self-isolating for any reason, your manager will support you to undertake any advocacy that can be provided by telephone, video call or email (most NHS Complaints Advocacy and some Professional Advocacy) along with any administrative tasks required by unaffected staff, or the referrals team.

If any of your cases need to be re-allocated, this will be done by a Managing Advocate or Service Manager within one working day.
If you are at increased risk from coronavirus

If you are in a category which places you at increased risk if you were to contract coronavirus, please speak to your manager or regional HR Manager. Managers will then work with you to understand how we can best support you.

Staying well

Continue to follow NHS guidance to wash your hands regularly for at least 20 seconds with hot water, or with hand sanitiser as an alternative. Avoid touching your face.

We understand that several colleagues have asked whether we have arrangements in place to source hand sanitisers, but regret that we do not have any privileged access to supplies and so strongly encourage colleagues to use those which are available on arrival, during and leaving premises which they are visiting, and to wash hands frequently, regularly and thoroughly with soap and water.

Staying updated

As guidance is constantly changing, please keep yourself up to date with the information produced by Public Health England:


We will also review the information we are providing on the intranet about coronavirus daily, so check for updates.

If you have a query or concern

If you have any specific concerns about yourself, your colleagues, or our clients' health and safety, please speak to your manager.