COVID-19 (Coronavirus) – Advice for Volunteers

1. Does your organisation have a Business Continuity Plan or a Covid-19 policy?

This is the starting point for practical advice that will apply to volunteering. Read it and digest it. If volunteering is not included, suggest to leadership that information on volunteers be added asap.

2. Can volunteers clearly communicate their needs?

Check that there is a clear system in place for getting in touch with volunteers / the organisation (e.g. when cancelling a shift). If you're unsure of what this is, ask. Also, make sure that your emergency contact details are up-to-date.

It's important that you can discuss honestly your situation and that managers / organisations exercise their duty of care towards you. At a minimum, this should be about encouraging volunteers to be cautious and to take care of themselves.

Volunteers, just as for other members of society, may be experiencing heightened anxiety - understand that COVID-19 and the response needed, affects each of us differently. Volunteers who are elderly or immunocompromised are at increased threat for serious complications. Volunteers living in poverty are less equipped financially to prepare for self-isolation. Those who have limited sick time or can't afford a period of time off work, may be afraid of missing work through volunteering etc.

3. Remember volunteering is a choice, freely made:

If you decide not to volunteer **_for any reason_** your organisation will support your decision including, and up to, a decision to temporarily suspend your own volunteering during this uncertain time.

Please take all necessary precautions if you are immunocompromised or live with/care for someone who is immunocompromised.

4. Does your volunteering meet the tests set by the Volunteer Charter?

Specifically, the [Volunteer Charter](#) states that 'Volunteers and paid workers should be able to carry out their duties in safe, secure and healthy environments' and 'Volunteers should not carry out duties formerly carried out by paid workers nor should they be used to disguise the effects of non-filled vacancies or cuts in services'. Clearly, we are in some extraordinary times however it is important that these tests are still met.

5. Be clear on when to self-isolate.

This advice is based on that provided by [Health Protection Scotland](#) and [NHS inform](#). If you have a recent onset of the following symptoms, you must self-isolate for 7 days from when your symptoms started:

- A new, continuous cough, and / or High temperature

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If you live in a household with someone who shows any of the above symptoms, you should stay at home for 14 days from the day the illness began in the first person to become ill. If you then develop symptoms within the 14 days, you should stay at home for 7 days from when your symptoms begin even if this takes you over the 14-day isolation period.

What to consider if you have to stay at home:

- Plan ahead and ask other team members for help to ensure that you can successfully and effectively volunteer from home if you are not sick / don't have symptoms
- Ask friends and family as well as colleagues to help you get the things you need to stay at home
- Stay at least 2 metres (about 3 steps) away from other people in your home if possible
- Sleep alone, if possible
- Wash your hands regularly for 20 seconds, each time using soap and water
- Stay away from vulnerable individuals, such as the elderly and those with underlying health conditions, as much as possible
- Consider whether older people and those with underlying health conditions can stay in another house while you need to stay at home
- Keep in touch with friends, family and colleagues over the phone or through social media

This action will help protect others in your place of volunteering as well as your community

6. What do I do if <u>you become unwell</u> whilst volunteering?

This advice is based on that provided by [Health Protection Scotland](#) and [NHS inform](#). This was current at time of publishing. If you develop any of the COVID-19 symptoms (a high temperature or a new continuous cough), please inform your volunteer manager or another manager immediately and go home to self-isolate or if you are seriously unwell, call NHS 111 or dial 999.

Please:

- Keep at least 2 metres away from others
- Avoid touching anything
- Advise your volunteer manager (or other manager) of any areas you've been to or surfaces you may have touched in the office
- Advise of anyone you've been in close contact with since feeling unwell
- If you are able to drive home, you should do so. If you have arrived by public transport or car share, you should arrange a taxi or a driver to take you home.
- If you are seriously unwell and require medical attention, we advise you are isolated while you wait for advice or an ambulance

Your organisation should arrange for an office deep clean after any affected volunteer has left the building.

7. Follow best practice to prevent catching or spreading Coronavirus.

This advice is based on that provided by Health Protection Scotland and NHS inform. This was current at time of publishing, as follows:

- Wash your hands regularly with soap & hot water for at least 20 seconds
- Wash your hands when you arrive at work & get home
- Use hand sanitiser gel if no soap & water is available
- Cover mouth & nose with a tissue or your sleeve if you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue away immediately & wash your hands
- Avoid close contact with people who are unwell
- Don't touch your eyes, nose, or mouth if your hands aren't clean
- Clean your desk, monitor, keyboard & phone regularly
- Wash cutlery & crockery used thoroughly with hot water & detergent; dry it thoroughly immediately and put it away
- Avoid physical contact with others as far as possible including shaking hands or hugging
- We encourage you to carry some tissues with you at all times in case you need to sneeze or cough.

Should you be given Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to carry out your volunteering? If you are volunteering with beneficiaries (or you yourself are) at higher threat of serious complications (see also point 3), take all recommended precautions. This includes use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) as and when guided by your organisation.

8. Involve volunteers in planning around volunteering.

Include volunteers in decision-making around plans and policies affecting them. Having volunteers at the table will ensure that their concerns are heard and addressed.

Ask volunteers about their availability to continue volunteering 1) currently, 2) if schools were to close, 3) if self-isolated (only if remote volunteering is possible). For volunteers who have high availability, ask if they would be willing to increase their volunteering temporarily to help fill gaps (given that they are healthy). Track responses and keep a database/spreadsheet of volunteers who anticipate availability in certain situations.

Work with organisational leaders to prioritise programming/services delivered by volunteers and determine where volunteering services should be focused if there is a significant decrease in availability.

9. Consider if and how volunteers can work remotely.

Volunteers may need to work from home particularly if impacted by school closures and caring responsibilities. As well as thinking about the work volunteers can complete for your organisation remotely you should determine what considerations have been made around infrastructure, equipment and processes required to allow volunteers to work remotely and the ongoing support they need.

10. Postpone large-scale volunteer events or training in the next few months.

Social distancing by avoiding crowds and events helps "flatten the curve" of the virus and helps keep cases within the capacity of our NHS.

For further advice or guidance please contact 01896 75 4041 or email **enquiries@vcborders.org.uk**.