



Our Response to the Coronavirus Pandemic

The coronavirus outbreak is unprecedented. The scale and impact will be enormous. Like everyone, the British Red Cross is navigating an uncertain and complex situation, and our response will develop quickly. We are all affected and working out the implications for ourselves, our loved ones and our society.

British Red Cross is committed to providing vital humanitarian, person-centred support for the most vulnerable. These people will be impacted by coronavirus more, so we are taking steps to ensure continuity in our core, critical services and putting plans in place to respond to the growing outbreak. Our focus is on understanding, anticipating and responding to needs in areas of high health inequalities, supporting those who fall through the gaps.

How we define vulnerable will change too. We need to consider the financial implications on households who self-isolate in the days and months ahead. Whether it's a parent struggling to feed their kids during the school closures, or a refugee living in poverty - those who already struggle to get by will face further hardship during this national crisis.

In the UK, our response to the coronavirus outbreak is focused on four key areas:

Support for the NHS

We have a long and proud history of working with the NHS. The unprecedented scale of the coronavirus pandemic places even greater strain on the UK's health services and we will continue to work in partnership to support vulnerable people affected.



Our services ensure people are supported to return home from hospital and that they have everything they need once home - from making sure the heating is working, getting the first food shop in or providing emotional support. Crucially, our support helps to ease the strain on the NHS by freeing up hospital beds, vital at a time when the need is only going to grow as the outbreak develops. We are currently working with 100 hospitals around the UK; many more have requested our support, but we are currently unable to meet the demand.

A key challenge is to maintain and deliver these services safely. We are adapting our response to accommodate the isolation period and are mobilising nationally to support the NHS as much as possible in these complex and challenging circumstances. Where possible, increasingly we will offer support online or via telephone welfare checks, helping to arrange delivery of medicines or welfare packs where they are needed most. We are encouraging everyone to look out for those in their community who many need some additional support. It's vitally important that those who are self-isolating have everything they need to remain safe and well at home.

The Vulnerable and Elderly

We know that the elderly and those who are already lonely will be hardest hit by this crisis, who will be self-isolating for a long period of time. Our initial focus will be supporting the 1.5 million individuals over the age of 70 who have existing medical conditions, as well as the 8 million over 70s who will also be stranded at home.

The challenge is vast. It will require collaboration across the sector, with local and national governments, businesses and more. That's why we are working with the Emergencies Partnership to understand how we can best support the most vulnerable people in our society. Together we will develop a joint information hub to track unmet need dynamically, feeding these insights into local and national government so communities can feel connected and prepared.



We have been supporting people and families self-isolating since the early stages of the outbreak, and this month sign-ups to our Community Reserve Volunteer network have jumped from 8,000 to over 35,000 people, demonstrating that people are prepared to come together to help those in crisis in their communities. These volunteers can be deployed in their local communities across the country, supporting with practical tasks such as organising supplies at food banks, calling vulnerable people or delivering welfare

packs. We know that connected communities are more resilient and better able to cope with crisis.

The British Red Cross is planning to launch a national support line in collaboration with a number of partners, available for anyone to call throughout this emergency to seek support. Our team will use a person-centred approach to establish each individual's needs and signpost to relevant support. In addition, we are engaging with Government at the highest level to help them design their offer to boost volunteering, increase communication and support charities to respond in sustainable ways.

Groups that are 'Off-Grid'

Across the world, people and families are migrating or being forced out of their homes at a greater rate than ever to search for new opportunities or safety – often because of climate-triggered natural disasters, protracted conflict, disease and poverty.

Refugees and asylum seekers are among the most vulnerable in the UK. Already we're hearing from our frontline services and others in the sector about issues people are facing as a result of the coronavirus outbreak. Many we support are destitute, homeless and isolated, and face barriers in accessing healthcare. There is a danger that many will fall through the gaps, making the potential impact of coronavirus for them even greater.



To begin, a large portion of our clients rely on asylum support payments to meet all their needs, which amount to living on less than £5.40 a day – frequently many are plunged into extreme poverty and faced with impossible choices on how to spend the little they have. Normally we offer practical support to help them meet their basic needs, including food parcels, clothing, small amounts of emergency cash and help finding accommodation. They depend on the British Red Cross to get by.

However, to curb the spread of the virus we have closed our offices and cancelled face-to-face appointments, moving toward a technology-based response focussing on critical casework activities. As we can no longer issue food parcels or hygiene products at our drop-ins, we are rapidly planning a national distribution of cards, pre-loaded with cash to our most vulnerable clients to make sure they can support themselves and their families through this difficult period. Sourcing emergency accommodation for destitute, homeless refugees and asylum seekers who are unable to self-isolate is another key challenge.

We are actively engaging the Home Office and other government agencies on behalf of the refugee sector, convening and collating questions from 25 organisations on a weekly basis. This allows us to swiftly identify and flag the emerging gaps in provision that are growing and ensure the needs of vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers are factored in

emergency planning across the country, giving a voice to the voiceless and making sure no one falls through the gaps during this national crisis.

Economic Insecurity

We know that many individuals and families will experience economic hardship as a result of the coronavirus outbreak. Across the UK, people are adjusting to the new realities of the crisis: those who are self-isolating will struggle to meet their basic needs as they cannot get to work to earn a living. People who are self-employed are faced with months of cancelled opportunities, whilst for others the prospect of losing their job is a stark reality. Caring responsibilities will increase as loved ones, neighbours and friends become sick. With schools closed, kids at home need to be fed.

At this time of change and uncertainty, we need to come together to help those most in need get through this crisis. The complex challenges that the most vulnerable people in the UK face are emotional and psychological, but also financial. We need your support to ensure that no one falls through the gaps.

That's why we're launching the Coronavirus Hardship Fund, which will provide grants to vulnerable individuals and families experiencing economic hardship as a result of the coronavirus outbreak. We're all in this together.

The Red Cross Movement

Around the world, Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers are helping communities stay safe – from checking temperatures at borders and airports, to bringing medicines to vulnerable people or using drones to safely decontaminate areas. There's a huge range of work going on and British Red Cross are supporting the global response. We have sent aid workers from our logistics, information management and communications teams to assist in Beirut, Beijing and Geneva.

The unprecedented scale of the coronavirus pandemic will challenge our organisation like never before.

To protect our staff and volunteers we have stopped all face-to-face fundraising, cancelled community events and made the difficult decision to close our shops across the UK. This will all have a significant impact on our income and ability to respond to this growing crisis at a time when the British Red Cross is needed by the NHS and vulnerable people in our communities more than ever.

Your support will change lives. Thank you.