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UK food supplies during the Coronavirus outbreak

The coronavirus outbreak is the biggest public health emergency in a generation. It calls for decisive action, at home and abroad, of the kind not normally seen in peacetime. As we work together to fight this pandemic, we all have a role to play.

[Our message to the public](#) is clear: you must **stay at home**, in order to **protect the NHS** and **save lives**.

I wanted to take this opportunity to update you on the actions that my department is taking to support the food industry and ensure that everyone has access to the supplies that they need.

Support for retailers

I have been and will continue to have regular conversations with industry, including the British Retail Consortium and supermarket CEOs to discuss with retailers the most important measures we need to take to keep stocks flowing, and to ensure that everyone can get the food and groceries they need.

Our retailers are working around the clock to ensure people have the food and products they need. Industry is adapting quickly to any changes in demands, and food supply into the UK has continued. Everyone working in the food and drink industry has rallied in an extraordinary way to respond to this unprecedented challenge. Having worked in the food industry myself, I am personally enormously proud and thankful for all the work that they have done in recent weeks, and will be asked to do in the weeks ahead.

The Government has taken a series of measures to alleviate pressures that retailers are facing. The Ministry for Housing, Communities, and Local Government have issued guidance to local authorities to show flexibility to allow extended delivery hours to supermarkets to ensure shelves can be replenished more quickly. The Transport Secretary has also announced a temporary and limited relaxation of the drivers' hours rules so that more goods can be delivered to every store every day.

We have temporarily relaxed elements of competition law to enable supermarkets to work more closely together to ensure people can access the products they need. Food retailers are now able to share data on their stock levels, cooperate to keep stores open and share

staff, distribution depots and delivery vehicles. This is helping keep shops open and staffed and better able to meet high demand.

Supermarkets are recruiting more staff, protecting shopping time for older and vulnerable people, and limiting shopping hours so they have more time to restock. As stock on shelves begin to replenish many supermarkets have now begun to lift buying restrictions on products to help people shop for others. They have issued a rallying call for everyone to play their part in the national effort to this response by looking out for their friends, family and neighbours. They are asking everyone to shop as they normally would, and pull together to support those staying at home.

Shielding the clinically extremely vulnerable

We initially estimated that 1.5 million people with specific underlying medical conditions would fall into the clinically extremely vulnerable group and require shielding. Those people were identified through GP records and hospital databases, but this number continues to be refined as we get more data. GPs have been provided with guidance to support individual decisions, and continue to identify further patients and advise them to shield. This process will be ongoing as people's medical conditions change. The NHS has written to all of those identified as the extremely clinically vulnerable asking them to self-isolate and giving them instructions of how to register on a Government website if they need support getting essential food supplies.

These essential food supplies are being delivered to clinically vulnerable people across England and will arrive within 7 days of a request for support via the webportal or phone line. A separate emergency drop of provisions was provided to local authorities to distribute food to those most in need while these deliveries began rolling out. Data has been shared with MHCLG and local authorities to identify vulnerable people who have requested food. Central and local government are also working closely with the many charities and community groups that are stepping up to provide support to people.

Retailers have also received data of the clinically vulnerable who have requested essential supplies via the webportal or phone line. Supermarkets are putting these customers at the front of the queue for online delivery slots, and customers must be registered with a supermarket to be prioritised in this way. Supermarkets are working round the clock to increase delivery slots and will continue to prioritise slots for the shielded group.

This week, the government began assigning tasks to more than 750,000 people across England who signed up as NHS Volunteer Responders via the mobile app GoodSam. These volunteers will help vulnerable people in England who are at most risk from coronavirus to stay well, including through delivering food and supplies.

Ensuring that the non-shielded vulnerable have access to the supplies that they need

We are working quickly to support people who do not fall into the category of being clinically extremely vulnerable, but still need help getting essential food supplies.

The government is working with industry, charities, other government departments and Devolved Administrations to ensure whatever support is needed is delivered in a coordinated and consistent manner. Defra Minister Victoria Prentis MP is leading on cross government work focussed on getting food to the vulnerable.

The government will encourage people to use their friends, families, neighbours and local communities to be active in supporting vulnerable groups rather than seeing online/click and collect as the first port of call. To support this, there is ongoing work to ensure existing support networks are aware of the volunteering opportunities, can register for them and know how to shop for others safely.

Challenges for producers in the food supply chain

The steps that have had to be taken to close pubs and restaurants have caused some disruption for producers in the food supply chain. In particular we are aware that there are challenges for some dairy processors, some wholesalers in the food service sector and parts of the fishing fleet. There have also been price impacts on sectors like beef and sheep. We have been working with the sectors to assist where we can and we will continue to do so.

The food industry is doing everything it can to rise to this challenge – and government and industry will continue to work together over the coming days and months.

Guided by the best scientific advice, with our clear action plan and our resilient food supply, we will rise to this challenge together.



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Annex: Actions the retail industry is taking:

- Sainsbury's, Waitrose, Asda and Tesco have used customer data to identify elderly and vulnerable customers for priority slots and are increasing home delivery and click and collect capacity.
- Morrisons is increasing availability to customers both through Morrisons.com and the Morrisons Store on Amazon Prime Now.
- ASDA and Marks and Spencer's have introduced cashless volunteer shopping voucher schemes for those self-isolating or in vulnerable groups.
- Sainsbury's is relaxing purchasing restrictions, but restricting entry to stores to one adult from each household at a time.
- Aldi, ASDA, Morrisons, Waitrose, and Lidl are easing limits on some goods in store, but customers are still encouraged to only buy what they need to ensure all customers continue to have access to all the products they need.
- Contactless card payment spending limit has increased from £30 to £45 to help minimise contact between staff and customers.
- Marks & Spencer has launched new online Food Boxes to help customers get products they need and support those who aren't able to easily visit stores.
- Morrisons have made a letter available on their internal website for their employees which clarify their key worker status in case of interaction with authorities.
- Asda will provide full pay to colleagues who have been identified by government as needing to self-isolate for 12 weeks and will offer fully paid leave to colleagues who are vulnerable or are the carers of extremely vulnerable people.
- Waitrose, ASDA, Lidl, Sainsbury's, Morrisons, Tesco, Iceland, Poundland, SPAR and Aldi are implementing measures to ensure social distancing in stores – these include protective screens, hand sanitiser provided in store and directional floor markings to ensure distances are kept in queues.
- Waitrose has announced a set of new measures to help its customers shop safely, including limiting customer numbers and introducing measures to ensure social distancing.
- Sainsbury's, Waitrose, Tesco, Marks and Spencer, Iceland and Asda are all reserving an hour in stores for elderly and vulnerable shoppers.
- Aldi, Marks and Spencer, Iceland, Tesco and Sainsbury's are creating a special shopping times for NHS and emergency service workers. Waitrose is taking in store measures to ensure NHS workers receive the groceries they need – including reserving essential stock and increasing the size of daily deliveries to all 46 hospital stores across the UK.
- Sainsbury's is offering an expanded 'click and collect service' and increasing the number of collection sites across the country. Waitrose is introducing special deliveries for vulnerable customers and Morrisons is making more online delivery slots.
- Tesco, Waitrose, Asda, Aldi, Morrisons, Co-op and Marks and Spencer are all limiting shopping hours so they can restock overnight.
- Morrisons has introduced immediate payments for its smaller suppliers so they can be paid more quickly. Aldi will pay any supplier with a turnover of less than £1m immediately.
- The Co-op is fast-tracking recruitment of 5,000 store colleagues to provide temporary employment for hospitality workers who have lost their jobs.
- Aldi has launched a recruitment drive to hire 9,000 new workers, including roles in every one of its stores and distribution centres.
- Lidl has donated £100,000 to the Covid-19 Emergency Community Fund, supporting vulnerable groups such as the elderly, and families who need help during school

closures. Lidl has also partnered with FareShare is donating a large volume of ambient products to FareShare and the Trussell Trust.

- Morrisons is distributing £10 million worth of food to food banks.
- Asda has donated £5m to food charities to support the most vulnerable people in local communities.
- Waitrose has set up a £1m Community Support Fund to help those in need.
- Marks and Spencer and Lidl have also started community funds.
- Co-op will donate £1.5m worth of food to FareShare. Iceland Foods Charitable Foundation has donated £150,000 to Age UK to specifically support older people during the COVID-19 crisis.
- Tesco is opening a pop-up store at Birmingham NHS Nightingale (hope to extend to the others) to provide easy access to food supplies for NHS workers, as well as partnering with salutethenhs.org to provide one million free meal parcels to frontline NHS workers.