

BIAZA Members' Advice Regarding Coronavirus

What is coronavirus?

A coronavirus is one of a large group of viruses that cause diseases in mammals and birds. In humans, coronaviruses cause respiratory tract infections that are typically mild, such as the common cold, though rarer forms such as SARS and COVID-19 can be lethal.

The recent outbreak of Covid-19 began in Wuhan, China but has now been found on each continent and the WHO have declared a pandemic. It is currently thought that the virus transfers in droplets of fluid in the air (6 ft radius) and via surfaces. For the majority of those infected, COVID-19 symptoms include a high temperature and a (new) continuous cough, which can last for a number of days. However, for those with a weakened immune system, the elderly and the very young, there's a chance the virus could cause a lower, and much more serious, respiratory tract illness like a pneumonia or bronchitis. The incubation period is long (up to 14 days) and those who are infected may not be aware which makes containment difficult. There is currently no treatment although scientists are working to develop a vaccine.

What should zoos and aquariums be doing?

All employers have a duty to take steps that are reasonably necessary to ensure the health, safety and welfare of all their employees, including those who are particularly at risk for any reason.

Zoos and Aquariums must take precautions and our advice would be as follows:

- ✓ Proactively monitor Government advice and update accordingly:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/guidance-for-employers-and-businesses-on-coronavirus-covid-19>
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/social-distancing-in-the-workplace-during-coronavirus-covid-19-sector-guidance>
<https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/news/covid-19-coronavirus> (Northern Ireland)
<https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/c36c85-covid-19-coronavirus/> (Republic of Ireland)
- ✓ Appoint a dedicated team, led by a senior manager, to direct communication and actions and stay fully up-to-date on all new guidance issued by the Government.
- ✓ Agree a position statement (following Government advice) or similar and base a comms plan (internal and external) around this.
- ✓ The internal comms plan should educate staff without causing panic. e.g. email or posters outlining the current situation and any government advice that you are following. It should include practical advice to stop the spread of germs (good handwashing and hygiene). If staff members have symptoms of coronavirus, they should follow most recent Government guidance (e.g. call NHS 111 for advice). Ensure all staff have access to this as well as guidance and support.
- ✓ Your public comms should let people know that by closing you are exercising social responsibility and are playing your part in the national and local community effort to control the spread of the virus.
- ✓ Increase regularity of cleaning in areas such as washrooms and other indoor spaces, as well as touchpoints such as keypads and door handles. Plan for possible requirement for specialist infection cleaning of areas, should staff members become infected.
- ✓ Define essential staff and plan a skeleton rota with cover in case of closure. Dividing essential staff into two or more teams and keeping them separate, staggering lunch breaks and cleaning shared areas regularly etc may help reduce the chance of all essential staff being infected at the same time. You may also be able to provide accommodation on site to

further reduce risk for key staff. Plan for loss of high proportion of specialist staff to sickness or self-isolation (e.g. trained animal care staff, particularly those trained for work with dangerous or specialist species, or gun crew) and loss of key leadership staff to sickness or self-isolation.

- ✓ High risk staff (i.e. those aged over 70, pregnant women and those with pre-existing medical conditions such as diabetes, heart disease and respiratory or immune problems) should not be allowed to continue to work on site.
- ✓ Assess exposure risk (both in terms of likelihood and consequences) to employees who are unable to work from home (see impact risk assessment template in references below).
- ✓ Prevent non-essential travel and consider online alternative options for any essential events/meetings which are planned.
- ✓ Consider risk and create plans for those staff based abroad, for example those involved in field programmes. Provide advice regarding hygiene and ensure regular communications continue. You may need to update field information to donors, trusts and grant-holders to ensure they are aware of any impact.
- ✓ Develop/review operational business continuity plans, contingency plans and exit strategies for different scenarios, i.e. no staff, no visitors, restrictions on food supplies, reduced cash flow, compulsory temporary closure, permanent closure etc.
- ✓ Look at supply chains that may be affected, particularly those of essential items e.g. specialist animal feeds.
- ✓ Review organisational insurances for income & life protection.
- ✓ Collate and maintain records of staff illness as there is a Public Health England requirement to report cases of coronavirus.
- ✓ If animal transfers are necessary, all possible steps must be taken to maintain social distancing as far as possible. International transfers will need special planning to take into consideration quarantine requirements (of animals and personnel), and in some cases may not be possible as not all borders have reopened.
- ✓ Covid-19 has the potential to infect a range of species, and infection has been reported in cats (including a tiger at Bronx Zoo), ferrets and rhesus macaques. Zoos should review biosecurity in situations where keepers are working in close contact with animals (especially primates, felids and mustelids), in order to prevent zoonotic spread between staff and animals. If available, surgical facemasks reduce the risk of saliva/nasal mucus transfer from humans e.g. through coughing or sneezing, and if possible, gloves should be worn during food preparation and in enclosures to prevent contamination of surfaces (see references below). Where gloves are not worn, hands should be washed regularly, particularly before and after food preparation. Minimise the number of keepers who are in contact with the animals and maximise distance from the animals where possible. Consider reviewing training protocols, e.g. review current requirement for training, the appropriate use of PPE, options for maximising the distance between trainer and animal etc. We would advise that close contact training is not carried out during this time, unless a cessation of training would negatively impact welfare.
- ✓ Develop your reopening strategy, based on suitable risk assessments and updated SOPs to optimise safety for your visitors, staff and animals. Document your decision-making and liaise with your local authority in planning potential reopening dates, which must be based on your regional Government Recovery Strategy. (BIAZA Reopening Guidelines are available [here](#) on the BIAZA website).

What Financial Support is available from the Government?

Financial support packages are being made available for each country/region within the UK and Ireland.

UK Government support is detailed here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-support-for-businesses>

And there is a coronavirus business support finder tool [here](#).

Defra have produced a guidance document specifically for zoos and aquariums in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland which should have been received by every collection via email, and is also available [here](#) on the BIAZA website. We would strongly recommend that each collection completes and submits the Defra questionnaire accompanying that email (also available [here](#) on the BIAZA website). If your collection is in severe financial distress and you have exhausted all the available Government support options then please contact the Defra Zoo Policy Team directly at zoos.branch@defra.gov.uk.

Key benefits to our UK members include:

- o The [Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme](#), providing loans both to SMEs and larger businesses which are interest free for 12 months.
- o [UK Bounce Back Loan Scheme](#) aims to help small and medium-sized businesses affected by coronavirus to access 100% Government-backed loans of up to £50,000.
- o The [Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme](#). This will provide Government grants to cover 80% the wages of staff who are furloughed (not working, but kept on payroll rather than being laid off) up to a total of £2500 a month, backdated to 1st March. All employers are eligible for this scheme and it is open until July, after which the scheme will be tapered and closed in October.
- o Deferment of the next quarter of VAT and income tax payments.
- o A Statutory Sick Pay relief package for small and medium sized businesses (SMEs)
- o Small business grant funding of £10,000 for all business in receipt of small business rate relief or rural rate relief.
- o A new lending facility from the Bank of England to help support liquidity among larger firms, helping them bridge coronavirus disruption to their cash flows through loans
- o The [Zoos Support Fund](#) is administered by Defra and is providing grants of up to £100,000 to collections in England which can demonstrate that they have exhausted all other measures.

Additional information on **Scottish Assembly support for Scottish businesses** is here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-individuals-and-businesses-in-scotland> and here: <https://findbusinesssupport.gov.scot/coronavirus-advice>

Additional information on **Welsh Government support for businesses in Wales** is provided here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-individuals-and-businesses-in-wales> and here: <https://gov.wales/business-and-employers-coronavirus>

Additional information on **Northern Ireland Executive support for NI businesses** is here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/covid-19-guidance-information-for-ni-businesses-employers#businesses> and https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/campaign/coronavirus-updates-support-your-business?utm_source=InvestNI&utm_medium=Organic%20Traffic&utm_campaign=Coronavirus&utm_content=CV

The Irish Government has published it's measures to support Irish businesses here:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/612b90-covid-19-information-for-employers/>

Key benefits available to our Irish members include:

- [Temporary Covid-19 wage subsidy scheme](#) – a grant to cover 70% of your employees' net wages (up to a maximum of E410 Euros).
- Short time work support scheme to allow employees to reduce their worker's hours.
- [Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland Working Capital scheme](#) – loans of up to E1.5million available at reduced rates.
- Increase of maximum loan available through Microfinance Ireland (firms with up to 9 employees) and moratorium on interest and repayments for 6 months.
- Business Continuity Vouchers through Local Enterprise Offices to assist with business continuity and preparedness connected to Covid-19 outbreak.
- Various tax measures including suspending interest on overdue VAT (Jan/Feb) and PAYE (Feb/Mar) liabilities, suspension of debt enforcement action.
- [Deferment of business rates payments](#) for most immediately impacted businesses for 3 months until end-May.
- [Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment](#) – for employees who lose jobs due to economic downturn caused by virus, E203 per week for 6 weeks to provide immediate support whilst applying for Job Seekers.

The BIAZA Office will make every effort to support the membership through this difficult period. If you have specific queries or concerns which are not addressed within this document or within the resources provided on the BIAZA website (<https://biaza.org.uk/resources/coronavirus-resources>) then please email: nicky.needham@biaza.org.uk.

Useful references:

AZA advice regarding Covid-19 and primates: https://zahp.aza.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/COVID-19-and-Great-Apes_3.12.2020.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1Md5HuoHqtY87Cf5z0XLDYyWTE5R7YgJ_3ZFIQ9oHJ2E-gPCyMlkguHG4

Britsafe information on how organisations should manage an outbreak, based on the gov.uk website advice: <https://www.britsafe.org/about-us/useful-information-for-employers-about-the-coronavirus/>

CDC Information relating to how this disease is spread: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/transmission.html>

IOSH information relating to travelling employees: https://www.iosh.com/more/news-listing/coronavirus-seven-ways-to-protect-travelling-employees/?utm_source=Twitter&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=SocialSignIn

Risk assessment template: <https://biaza.org.uk/resources/mission-enabling-resources>

