**Caronavirus / COVID19 Pandemic**

**The government has announced new stricter measures for social distancing including:**

* Everyone should avoid gatherings and crowded places, such as pubs, clubs and theatres
* Everyone should work from home if they can
* All "unnecessary" visits to friends and relatives in care homes should cease
* People should only use the NHS "where we really need to" - and can reduce the burden on workers by getting advice on the NHS website where possible
* By next weekend, those with the most serious health conditions must be "largely shielded from social contact for around 12 weeks"

For more information please see the government guidance on social distancing [here.](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults)

Currently we are experiencing a global pandemic crisis as SARS-CoV-2 (the virus) resulting in Corvid-19 (the disease) has spread to most countries around the world. This is a new respiratory disease previously unseen in humans and is commonly referred to as the 'Coronavirus'. Pandemics are unpredictable in nature and credit unions need to prepare for potential disruption to their operations.

Some of the information here has been sourced from the NHS website (view [here](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/)) which is updated regularly and we urge credit unions to check regularly for new or emerging advice and guidance.

As you'll understand, this is a rapidly evolving situation and we'll do our best to ensure this guide is up to date and include the items of emerging relevance and importance to our members.

**Background**

**What are the symptoms?**

It can take up to 14 days for the symptoms of coronavirus to appear.
These symptoms may include:

* a cough
* a high temperature
* shortness of breath
* Coronavirus can also cause more severe illness including:
* pneumonia
* severe acute respiratory syndrome
* kidney failure

**How is it spread?

Coronavirus is spread in sneeze or cough droplets. You could get the virus if you:**

* come into close contact with someone who has the virus and is coughing or sneezing
* touch surfaces that someone who has the virus has coughed or sneezed on

Because it's a new illness, it is not known how easily the virus spreads from person to person. It is not known if someone can spread the virus before they show symptoms.

The virus may only survive a few hours if someone who has it coughs or sneezes on a surface. Simple household disinfectants can kill the virus on surfaces. Clean the surface first and then use a disinfectant.

**Business Continuity and Preparedness Plan:**

Last week we shared a plan drafted by Jubilee Tower Credit Union who agreed to share it with you all. If you haven’t already done so, or if you haven’t already got your own plan in place, it may be prudent to read through the plan and see what you can take from it for your own credit union.

With the government’s new guidance on social distancing you will need to ensure you are putting the necessary restrictions in place so that no volunteers, staff or members are put at risk at your offices or service points. Where possible you need to allow your staff / volunteers to work from home or if this is not possible, then ensure you are taking all the necessary precautions with the cleaning routines of surfaces and hands to avoid spreading the virus.

If you need to close your service points or offices you need to advise your members (and keep them up to date on any further changes) and also the inform the PRA and FCA so that they are fully aware of what is happening (they do not want people panicking thinking you have closed due to insolvency or other issues, etc).

In this scenario, for those who do not already have online or telephone facilities for members to access their accounts, where possible you must try and offer your members alternative methods of depositing into their accounts, (you can ask them to make direct bank payments or set up a standing order) making withdrawals (telephone applications using pre-set passwords and payments made by bank transferor onto a prepaid card) or applying for loans (postal applications with original documentation received with payments being made by bank transfer or onto a prepaid card) .

**Annual General Meetings Issues:**

For any credit union that may need to postpone their AGM you need to make sure that your members are well informed, and you seek to propose a new date later in the year. Not holding your AGM within the required time (as per your rules) can be challenged by your members, however, the FCA guidance is as follows:

**FCA guidance: "Where, following government guidance, the postponement of a general meeting results in a breach of a legislative requirement, it may fall to the FCA to make a decision as registering authority as to what if any action we take. We do not generally consider it to be in the public interest to take action in this context where we can see that a society is taking steps to ensure they meet the legislative obligation as soon as reasonably practicable."**

For more information on this see CoopsUK guidance [here](https://www.uk.coop/coronavirus-governance-advice-members)

**Audited Accounts and CY Returns:**

These do NOT need to be agreed or approved by your members before you submit them to the regulators, please ensure you submit as normal through the BEEDS (PRA) and the Mutual Societies (FCA) portals as required.

**Forbearance and Loan Delinquency issues**:

Credit Unions can choose to offer payment holidays or reduced repayment terms to members who may be suffering financial difficulty with the loss or reduction of income from their employer. You will need to ensure your credit union makes the best decisions in line with your own operations.

Loans that become in arrears are subject to the regulatory bad debt provisions which with a potentially sudden spike in arrears could have a serious detrimental affect on your reserves and capital ratio. The PRA will be issuing some guidance around this matter very soon.

**Employees and Volunteers**

**Communicating precautionary advice to credit union employees and volunteers regarding prevention/hygiene:**

In cases of managing major viral infections and other epidemics, it is essential to stay healthy and hand hygiene is of paramount importance. Employers should communicate the key hygiene messages to staff to assist in the prevention of the spread of a virus. There are a number of Public Health England posters available [here](https://campaignresources.phe.gov.uk/resources/campaigns/101/resources/5016) (you will have to register to get access to these – this takes only a minute).

**Key areas to consider include:**

* encouraging a respiratory hygiene or cough/sneeze etiquette approach.
* articulating a correct hand washing procedure.
* ensuring there are adequate supplies of infection control supplies (e.g., tissues, bins, disinfectant wipes, hand sanitisers).
* considering non-essential travel restrictions where there are affected geographic areas.
* considering reasonable options for individuals who may be deemed at high risk (particularly employees with health concerns or who are pregnant).

We encourage you to regularly visit the Government website [[here](https://naylorwintersgill.us15.list-manage.com/track/click?u=becb5618c889428ad676b5bc3&id=447f7b0266&e=a90d7b94f3)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19) for all the very latest COVID-19 guidance for employees, employers and businesses.

**Clarify the credit unions’ procedures and policies in relation to attendance and absence**

Where absence becomes problematic, it is important to review and formally implement the absence and sick leave policies in place in the credit union. Credit unions need to re-communicate the relevant policies to employees and reinforce the pertinent aspects of the policies.

In advance of any potential increase in absence, it is important that all employees are made fully familiar with policy requirements, particularly around what constitutes acceptable reasons for absence and the notification requirements. At the time of writing the UK Government has reduced the time that employees need to be sick before receiving Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) from four days in a row to the first day of illness.

Someone who is capable of work (and not sick at that time) but is known or reasonably suspected of being infected or contaminated may also be entitled to SSP. As it may deter people who should be self-isolating (or an infection risk) from taking unpaid leave, Health Secretary Matt Hancock has stated that an employee will be entitled to SSP if they are self-isolating on written advice from a GP (or NHS 111). The entitlement to SSP depends on this written advice – if the employee was not advised in writing to self-isolate, they may not be entitled to SSP.

Employees who have travelled to areas affected by Covid-19 and who have been in contact with individuals who have the Coronavirus or indeed any virus of special concern should notify the credit union before attending for work. Follow the [NHS guidance](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/self-isolation-advice/) for advice on recommended quarantine procedures.

If they not experiencing severe symptoms, it may be possible for employees to work remotely during a period of quarantine. If an employee is absent due to a fear of contracting the virus an employer must consider the risks and consider whether the employee is a vulnerable employee. Where there is no increased risk for the employee, the employer can request them to attend work.

At some point, based on public health advice, certain aspects of policy and procedure may require adjustment in accordance with the situation as it evolves.

**Business Continuity Considerations**

**Assumptions:**

* Supply chain and contractors are likely to be similarly impacted and may not be able to provide services, or only at reduced capacity.
* Essential services – such as fire and police may be reduced
* Borders may be closed, and even domestic travel may be severely restricted
* A pandemic would likely be drawn out over a significant period of time
* Disruption is human resource orientated and credit unions can expect unusually high levels of employee absence

**Business Continuity Considerations for Credit Unions**

* Has a senior individual and deputy been identified as responsible for preparedness and response planning?
* Have essential staff and critical external dependencies (e.g. IT suppliers) required to main credit union operations been identified?
* Have contingencies been arranged for the loss of essential staff and support?
* Has suitable hygiene, absence and isolation advice been issued to staff?
* Has the credit union considered the impact of not only personal illness but family member illness, community containment measures and quarantines, public transportation closures on staff?
* Have you identified staff and volunteers (as well as members where appropriate) with underlying conditions and incorporated their requirements into your plan?
* Has the credit union considered continuity of services for members in the event of potential closure of the main office / branch?
* Can back office functions can be performed flexibly in terms of hours worked and location (e.g. working from home)?
* Are you able to implement guidelines to modify the amount of face-to-face contact between staff, volunteers and members (such as hand-shaking, seating in meetings, shared workstations) with reference to government guidelines?
* Have you considered the need that other staff may be, if willing, required to work longer hours to keep the business running? You will need to comply with working time legislation here to ensure appropriate hours are worked and breaks taken.
* Are emergency contact numbers and details up to date?

**Communicating with members about the Coronavirus**

As there is a significant level of public unease in relation to the Coronavirus, it is critical that any public information issued should be factual, balanced and sensitive to the current situation. Before issuing any communication, you should ensure that it is in keeping with the Government and health authorities’ advice on the matter.

In advance of any disruption to services, you may wish to advise members about how they can use the credit union’s services without physically visiting the offices (e.g. phone, email or online banking etc.).

* It is recommended to use a single webpage (e.g. cuname.uk/covid19) to provide information on this topic. This webpage should be updated as the situation evolves. Using a single updated webpage lessens that chance that credit union members will access outdated information.
* When sharing information via social media, it can be challenging to communicate a detailed, nuanced message. Please ensure anything posted is concise, factual and does not have the potential to misinform people who may not read all of the text.
* Where possible, all social media posts should contain a link to the credit union’s website where more detailed information can be provided. Similarly, when dealing with queries on social media (on page or via private message), where possible direct queries to the information page on your website.
* In the event of a large number of queries on this topic, you may wish to incorporate a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section on your website.
* Do not engage in any speculation in relation to this topic. Keep any responses factual and aligned to the information which you have issued. Ensure the tone of any responses is reassuring and sensitive.
* The current situation is evolving at a fast pace. Credit unions must ensure that they have the ability to update all of their communications channels quickly, so that they are providing the most relevant information. This is particularly relevant for updates which may need to be issued outside of office hours.
* Where appropriate, a dedicated phone number and/or email address should be provided so that any members with further queries can contact the credit union directly.

**Possible Statement for Website – Access to your Credit Union Account**

In light of the ongoing national situation with the Coronavirus (COVID-19), we would like to remind members about how they can transact with the credit union without physically visiting one of our offices.

You may wish to:

* Speak to a Member of Staff – details here
* Submit a query via email – details here
* Use our Online Banking – details here about how to register or how to log in

For the latest information from the NHS in relation to the Coronavirus, please visit the NHS website at the link below

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

Should there be any impact on credit union operations, we will provide updated information on our website and social media channels.

**Possible Statement in the event of a decision to temporarily close an office**

**Please note – this statement is to be used for GUIDANCE ONLY and must be updated to reflect the credit union’s individual situation and the evolving situation in relation to the Coronavirus.**

In light of the ongoing situation with the Coronavirus (COVID-19), the public offices of XZY Credit Union have been temporarily closed. This closure affects the credit unions offices in X, Y and Z area. This decision has been taken in order to limit the potential impact which this virus may have in the local community.

According to XXX, Manager/ CEO of XXX Credit Union Limited

*“In light of the current situation and in the interests of public safety, we have taken a decision to temporarily close our offices. We understand that this will inconvenience many of our members but we believe that it is appropriate in light of the current situation with regard to the Coronavirus (COVID-19). This*decision has been made in the best interest of all of our members and the communities which we serve”.

INSERT DETAILS IN RELATION TO ACCESS TO ACCOUNTS – Example below,

The staff of the credit union are available to deal with member queries via phone (phone number) and email (email address). In addition, members are reminded that they may continue to access their accounts via the credit union’s website or App.

The credit union will continue to monitor the current situation and is in contact with the relevant authorities in relation to this matter. Updates to this situation will be made available on the credit union’s website and social media channels in the coming days.

If you have a query on this matter, please contact the credit union via email at xxx@xxx.uk  or phone 123 123 123 12