

CORONAVIRUS HOW IS THE UK PLANNING FOR AN OUTBREAK?

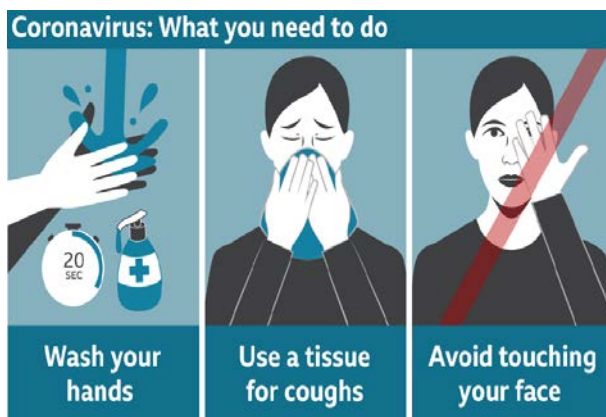
BBC Nick TriggleHealth correspondent 5 March 2020

[Coronavirus outbreak..](#) Measures to delay the spread of coronavirus in the UK are being considered by health officials.

So what could happen and is the NHS well prepared? Could schools close and public gatherings be banned? The [government has powers](#) it can use to protect people from infection. What measures will be used are still being decided, but they could include:

1. School closures. Laws to allow bigger class sizes if there are teacher shortages may also be introduced
2. Restrictions on the use of public transport
3. The stopping of big gatherings
4. Troops supporting the emergency services
5. Police focusing on the most serious crimes and maintaining public order
6. New legal powers to make people stay in quarantine

A public information campaign will be launched to help people protect themselves. The main focus will be on regular and thorough hand washing.



What do I need to know about the coronavirus?

LATEST: [Live coverage of the outbreak](#)

EASY STEPS: [What can I do?](#)

A SIMPLE GUIDE: [What are the symptoms?](#)

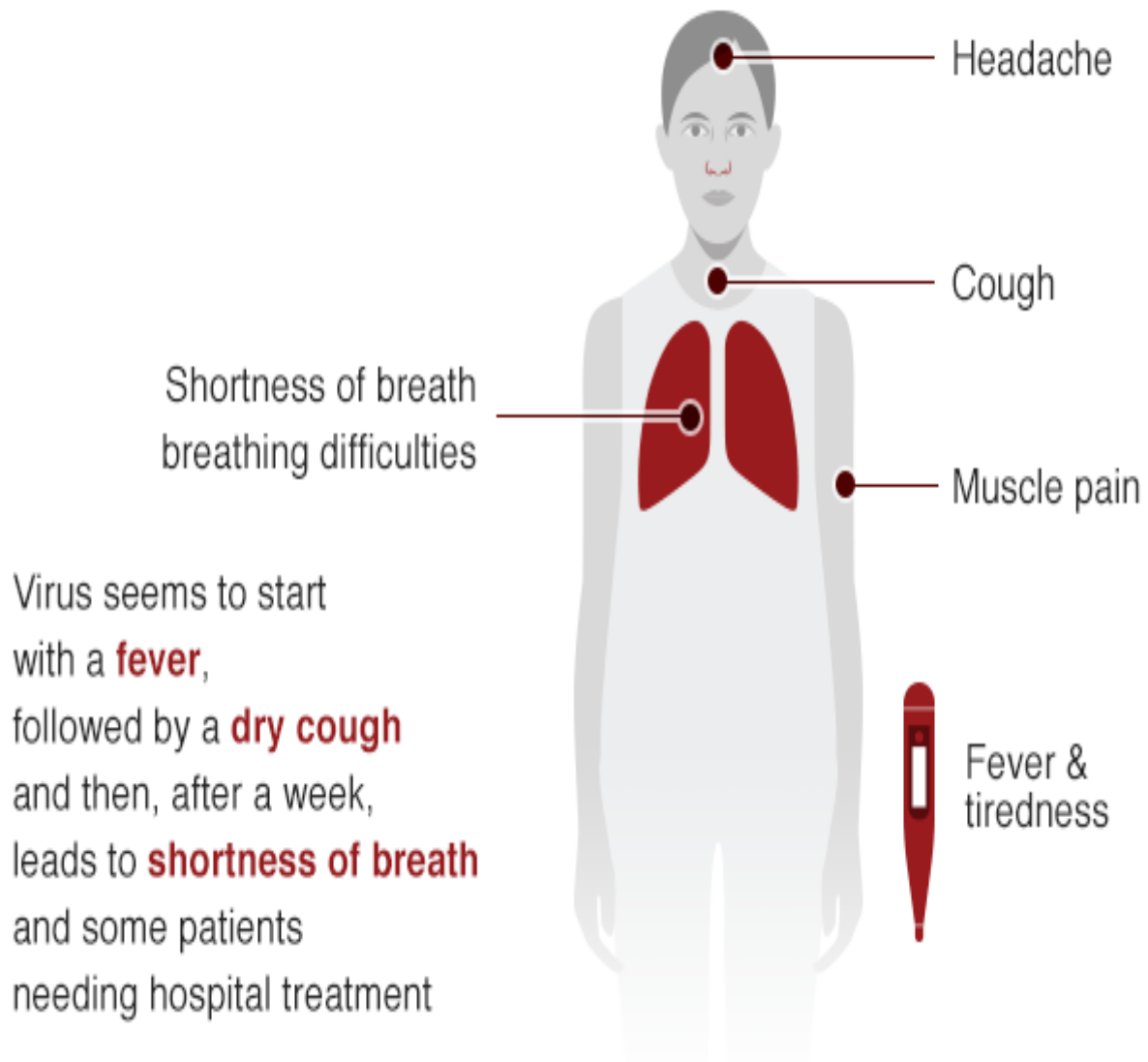
MAPS AND CHARTS: [Visual guide to the outbreak](#)

VIDEO: [The 20-second hand wash](#)

When could these powers be used? Exactly what steps are taken will depend upon the severity of the outbreak. The spread of coronavirus is being monitored by health officials. And the government's emergency Cobra committee - made up of ministers, civil servants and officials - is co-ordinating the response. Drastic steps such as closing schools would have major social and economic consequences. Because of this, ministers have stressed the need not to over-react. It is also virtually impossible to stop all social contact. As such, measures designed to stop people mixing may be most likely when there are local outbreaks. This could be in an attempt to slow the spread of the virus and limit the number of cases ahead of an expected peak.

Is the NHS ready for coronavirus? Up to [a fifth of the UK workforce could be off sick during the peak weeks](#) of a major outbreak, the government says. It believes there could be an increase in deaths, especially among elderly people and those with pre-existing conditions such as heart or lung problems and diabetes. The NHS has detailed plans to cope with outbreaks of disease and surges in demand.

Symptoms of coronavirus (Covid-19)



Source: WHO

BBC

There are 30 hospitals on stand-by to take patients - although most of the UK cases so far have been taken to one of five specialist hospitals in England. But the rest of the NHS has been put on an emergency footing. Hospitals have been asked to draw up plans to segregate coronavirus patients from others and supply staff with protective masks and suits. Every hospital has been told to set up isolation pods in case patients arrive with the virus. These are not to treat patients, but to ensure they do not mix with other patients and staff when they arrive. Patients are [being advised to contact NHS 111 in England](#) and self-isolate - the rest of the UK has its own arrangements. People who are worried they may have coronavirus should not go to A&E, or their GP.

How will the NHS treat seriously ill patients? Currently there is no treatment or cure, so hospitals are trying to relieve the symptoms. Specialist equipment called ECMO - which helps with breathing - is available at a small number of units for the most severely ill patients if their lungs fail. In the worst-case scenario of widespread transmission in the UK - an epidemic - the 30 hospitals could start cancelling routine treatments to prioritise coronavirus patients.

Coronavirus guidance

Advice for people who think they may have coronavirus

- Step one**  Do not go to a GP surgery, pharmacy or hospital
- Step two**  Contact NHS 111
- Step three**  You may be asked to self-isolate
- Step four**  Your details may be passed to local health protection teams
- Step five**  You may then be tested for the virus
- Step six**  A doctor or nurse will give you advice on what to do next

Source: NHS England/Public Health England

BBC

Assessments are being made about which patients can be advised to stay at home and isolate themselves to allow hospitals to focus on the most severely ill. The illness caused by the virus for many seems to be mild and passes.

Can coronavirus be contained? Public Health England officials have said [widespread transmission of coronavirus in the UK is "highly likely"](#). They believe some people infected have no link to overseas cases. Efforts are now on [delaying the spread of the disease](#), the aims of which include:

- Pushing cases further away from winter pressures on the NHS, so there is more capacity
- Allowing time for the UK to improve its response, or develop measures such as drugs and vaccines
- Push cases towards summer, when the rate of transmission could be lower

Work to contain the disease is also continuing. That involves tracing people who have had close contact with infected people and [getting them to self-isolate](#).

<https://www.bbc.com/news/explainers-51632801>