

Coronavirus (COVID:19) in Cumbria

Updating your Community Emergency Plan

September 2020



Introduction

This pack is for communities in Cumbria that have already written a community emergency plan, and are thinking about how they might update it in light of Coronavirus.

If your community doesn't already have a community emergency plan, but you're interested in writing one, you can find information on the ACT website. Scroll down to the bottom of this webpage and you'll find resources including a guide to how to start a conversation about how your community might react to an emergency, and a template for a community emergency plan:

<https://www.cumbriaction.org.uk/what-we-do/community-emergency-planning>

Different communities have very different emergency plans – what works in a small village doesn't necessarily work in a larger town! So don't worry if some parts of the pack aren't relevant to your group.

Contents

Introduction	2
Key points to think about.....	3
How have the statutory sector's emergency plans changed?.....	4
Keeping your volunteers safe	5
Door knocking	5
Setting up flood defences	5
Radios, laptops and other equipment	6
Running a Coordination Centre	6
Community Reception Centres.....	7
Helping your community prepare.....	8
Further information and support.....	8

Key points to think about

Coronavirus has changed many things in our everyday life, and so you'll already be familiar with many of the key things to think about in relation to your community emergency plan.

Many community groups will also have had experience of helping with food deliveries and other support during lockdown, which will help your planning.

It's not always possible to plan every detail in advance, but thinking about how you might need to adapt your plan and update your risk assessment is still useful.

- **Don't volunteer to help others if you're experiencing any coronavirus symptoms** (unless you can do some from home)
- **If you or any of your volunteers have been shielding, think about how they can help safely.** Don't put pressure on them to volunteer, but if they still want to help, think about ways they can do this from home rather than being in a crowded indoor space.
- **Remember that some of the people who'd normally help might be unavailable** because they're ill or self-isolating– so think about who else might be able to help, what training they might need, and if you could manage with fewer people than normal.
- **Think about how to reduce face to face contact** - could you brief volunteers by telephone or by videoconference rather than in person in your village hall?
- **Keep things clean** – wash your hands frequently, try to avoid sharing equipment, and clean surfaces often. If you're serving refreshments, it might be easiest to have disposable cups and plates.
- **Keep your distance – people from different households should stay 2m apart.** If you use a building such as a village hall as a coordination centre or as a community reception centre:
 - Would signs, floor markings or a one-way system help? You can find some useful posters here: <https://coronavirusresources.phe.gov.uk/stay-alert-to-stay-safe-/resources/posters/>
 - Can you reduce the number of people who need to be in the building – can some volunteers help from home, or (if the weather's good!!) could you meet outdoors?
 - Don't be afraid to remind people to keep their distance – in particular, the emergency services, who are used to having to work in situations where physical distancing just isn't possible. They won't be upset if you remind them to keep back!
- **Face coverings** are becoming a requirement in more and more indoor settings, including community buildings – but remember some people are exempt from wearing them.
- **Think about "bubbles"** – if you need to work in teams, try to set up rotas so that the same people are always working together as much as possible
- You might want to **update your first aid kit** to include face masks, disposable aprons and googles
- **Make sure everyone knows about any changes to your plan!**

You need to take reasonable steps to keep your volunteers and those you're helping safe, and it can be helpful to keep a simple record of the steps you've agreed to achieve this.

It might be helpful to practice setting things up, or to run a training session for your volunteers, so that everyone's familiar with any changes you make.

How have the statutory sector's emergency plans changed?

Coronavirus has meant that the statutory sector has been working very differently for many months. Far more people are working from home, and all the coordination meetings for the coronavirus response have taken place by telephone or video conference, rather than the normal meetings at Police HQ.

Emergency planners have now reviewed the main plans for Cumbria and updated them to take account of Coronavirus.

The biggest change that it's useful for you to be aware of is around the main reception centres set up by the local authority (District Council).

Normally, there'd be just one reception centre set up for each town – but during the coronavirus pandemic, it is important to try and keep people who have (or who are likely to have) coronavirus apart from people those who don't, as well as making special arrangements for people who might need to "shield" because they are likely become very ill if they contract Coronavirus.

If people are asked to evacuate their homes (because of a flood, gas leak, smoke from a nearby fire, etc) then they'll be asked if they've tested positive for coronavirus, been asked to self-isolate by Test & Trace, if they have any coronavirus symptoms, or if they have been advised to shield. Which reception centre they're directed to will depend on their answers to those questions – so don't be surprised if you discover that people are being directed to evacuate to more than one place.

As usual, the exact locations of reception centres won't be known in advance, but if there's an incident, do ask the emergency services where the reception centres are and where people should go.

It might be helpful to look at Cumbria's Community Risk Register:

<https://www.cumbria.gov.uk/emergencyplanning/supportingpages/crr.asp>

This will give you some ideas about the types of emergencies Cumbria plans for, some of which you might also want to consider in your community emergency plan.

Keeping your volunteers safe

Door knocking

It's often necessary to knock on people's doors in order to warn them of an incident like flooding.

Just make sure you step back from the door before they answer so that you stay 2m apart.

If volunteers from different households are working together, again, they should try to stay 2m apart.

Would be helpful to remind your volunteers to carry a face covering in case they find themselves in a situation where it's hard to stay at a safe distance?

Do you want to issue your volunteers with basic PPE such as a facemask and hand sanitiser?

If you think it's likely to be necessary to evacuate, would it be sensible to ask the following questions?

- Can they confirm that they have **not** tested positive for coronavirus (within the last 10 days), and that they have **not** experienced coronavirus symptoms or been asked to self-isolate (within the last 14 days)?
- Are they at high risk of developing a severe illness if they contract coronavirus (for example, because they have medical conditions that put them in the "shielding group")?

Not everyone may want to share this information at an early stage, but many people will be happy to; if you do collect this information, make sure you store it safely, and only share it with people who need to know (such as the emergency services).

Setting up flood defences

Some community emergency planning groups help set up flood defences – at individual homes or at the community level – or other tasks involving some lifting and carrying.

This might mean two people working close to each other; if that's the case, consider if it would be appropriate to issue volunteers with basic PPE such as a face mask and hand sanitiser.

Radios, laptops and other equipment

The risks of coronavirus transmission from hard surfaces are now thought to be relatively low; the main risk is from droplets caused by people coughing and talking.

However, it's still sensible to minimise the use of shared equipment – and where that's not possible, have cleaning materials to hand so that they can be wiped down between users.

Could you distribute radios and chargers between volunteers in advance, rather than storing them centrally?

Running a Coordination Centre

There's a higher risk of catching coronavirus indoors, so it's sensible to limit the number of people in your coordination centre, and the length of time they spend there – whilst still being able to do the job you need to be able to do!

The "Rule of 6" has an exemption for "the provision of voluntary services", so if you need to more than six people involved, this isn't a problem in itself. You can read the list of exemptions here (Section 2): <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-meeting-with-others-safely-social-distancing/coronavirus-covid-19-meeting-with-others-safely-social-distancing>

Have a think if you could make changes to the layout of your centre to help people a safe distance apart.

Can you open windows and doors to increase air flow through the room? We realise this may not be possible in all weather conditions!

What cleaning materials and PPE do you need to help keep things safe?

A coordination centre (where it is only your volunteers and staff from statutory sector responder organisations) will be viewed as a place of work, which currently means that it is not necessary to wear face coverings if you are able to keep a safe distance apart. However, some volunteers may be more comfortable wearing them, and many coordination tasks could still be carried out whilst wearing one. Would it be helpful to think in advance if you want volunteers to wear them?

Guidance on when face coverings should be worn is changing frequently, and you can check the latest information on the government website: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

Community Reception Centres

Reception centres are normally set up by the District Council, but we know that some isolated rural communities set up their own, more local centres.

If you'll be running a community reception centre, there are a few more things to think about, because you'll have members of the public present as well as your own volunteers.

Everyone – volunteers and public – in a community reception centre should wear a face covering unless they are exempt from doing so (for example, young children or people with breathing difficulties).

Most people will now have their own face coverings, but you might want to keep a small stock of spare disposable face masks – these are now widely available and the price is reducing. Hand sanitiser and cleaning wipes/sprays are also likely to be useful.

You'll need to try and keep people who are at high risk of having coronavirus separate from other people – so you'll probably want to ask some basic questions as people arrive:

- Do they have any symptoms of coronavirus – high temperature, cough, or loss of smell/taste?
- Have they been in contact with anyone who has recently been diagnosed with coronavirus?
- Have they been advised to self-isolate by contact tracers (or for other reasons, such as returning from a holiday abroad)?

Ideally, people who answer “yes” to these questions should be in a different building to others; this might not be possible in the smallest communities, but do have a think about how you can keep them as far apart from others as possible.

People who are at risk of serious complications of coronavirus (the “shielding” group) should also remain separate if at possible – could they go to a local pub, or a building in a neighbouring community?

Helping your community prepare

Some community emergency planning groups will be keen to help the rest of their community prepare for incidents this winter. If your group is keen to do so, here are some ideas on how. You could encourage people to think about:

- Writing a household emergency plan - this might help them to be able to safely stay in their own home during some emergencies, rather than have to go to a crowded reception centre. You can find a template to print here: <https://www.cumbriaaction.org.uk/resources/research-other/pub024a2020-02householdepleafletto-print-a4.pdf>
- Who could help them with shopping they come into contact with someone who tests positive for coronavirus, and are asked to self-isolate.
- Having some basic food supplies in their house in case they're asked to self-isolate, or if they're stuck at home in bad weather.
- What they'd need to take with them if they needed to leave home in a hurry – and making a list of this (or packing a grab bag). Phone chargers and power banks can be particularly useful!

Further information and support

If you need any further help updating your community emergency plan, please contact ACTION with Communities in Cumbria (ACT):

info@cumbriaaction.org.uk / 01768 425666

<https://www.cumbriaaction.org.uk/>