

COVID-19: Information and guidance for clinics



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Introduction

Pro bono clinics, as with all services, continue to be affected by the pandemic, both in terms of demand (i.e., people looking for information and advice), and how clinics operate and manage risks. Most clinics have continued their temporary suspension of face-to-face advice sessions, but many are reviewing this situation in light of developments from July.

We have received many inquiries from clinics about best practice, and revised our guidance, including a new resource on risk assessments. Emergence and transition from the 'lockdown' period is proving to be slow and complex, with variations in guidance between the UK nations, regionally and locally, and in relation to different parts of society and areas of life and work.

This information is intended to help you decide on the steps that your clinic may need to take in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. It draws on the best available advice and guidance, including links to the latest best practice and information from the NHS and Public Health England, and decisions by policy makers. The guidance is designed to:

- Help you to develop and enhance your clinic's response;
- Enable you to continue to provide a service to your community, including alternatives ways to deliver services;
- Prioritise health and safety and protect and support staff, volunteers, beneficiaries and service users;
- Support the clinics network and signpost to the most appropriate sources of expert information to help clinics manage through the crisis.

Your clinic

The response of each clinic has been partly shaped by institutional setting, and emergency protocols, policies and guidance that are directly relevant to that setting. For example, there is government advice for educational settings; for social care, and hostel and day care providers you may want to consider if they apply to your organisation. By institutional setting we mean:

- If your clinic is attached to a law school and university, then the university's policies may provide a response framework, including on human resources issues, student welfare, risk assessment and a crisis recovery plan. Many Universities are continuing with remote learning and assessment. Universities UK have published specific guidance:
 - [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) - information for universities](#)
- If you are attached to an advice agency or other charity, then it is likely that the parent charity, or its relevant membership body, will have detailed materials about operating services through the pandemic (see section - [Voluntary Sector resources](#)). Government have also produced guidance for the charity sector and guidance on volunteering.
 - [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) guidance for the charity sector](#)
 - [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) guidance on volunteering, rights and expenses](#)
- If your clinic is attached to a law firm you might find these resources useful:
 - Collaborative Plan's guidance useful [forthcoming].
 - The Law Society's [guidance on Covid-19 and pro bono](#) may also be useful. Sources of information and advice

Sources of information and advice

If you are looking for trusted, up-to-date information, some sources of information you should look the following websites:

- [Government & Public Health England information](#)
- [NHS Guidance](#)
- [World Health Organisation](#)
- [Centre for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

Your local authority may also have information specific to your area

Voluntary sector resources, information and guidance

Many clinics are part of wider networks in the voluntary sector, and many organisations and umbrella bodies are shaping and sharing good practice, and ideas on how to manage through the crisis. We especially recommend looking at the NCVO's guidance.

- [National Council of Voluntary organisations](#)
- [CABlink](#) (for Citizens Advice Clinics)
- [AgeUK guidance](#)

- [AdviceUK briefing](#)
- [Youth Access](#)
- [Equally Ours](#)

Your clients

In all that clinics and partner organisation do to respond to the situation, the needs of clients should always be first and foremost, and many clients may come from groups with disabilities or other vulnerabilities which may put them at greater risk. Here are some of the resources that you may want to look at in relation to particular client groups:

- [Clinically extremely vulnerable groups](#)
- [Dementia](#)
- [Homeless people](#)
- [Mental health](#)
- [Motor neurone disease](#)
- [Multiple sclerosis](#)
- [Parkinson's disease](#)
- [Renters](#)
- [Victims of domestic abuse](#)

The response and resources in the justice sector

The courts, regulators and professional bodies have produced sector specific information that may be relevant:

- [HMCTS rolling guidance](#)
- [Prisons and detention centres](#)
- [Law Society](#)

The response of funders

Charity funders are acutely aware of the pressures on the sector. An alliance of funders from across sectors came together to sign a joint statement pledging to offer support to civil society groups affected by the coronavirus outbreak. There have been new funder commitments, including from National Lotteries Community Fund, Government and the Community Justice Fund; LawWorks have been collating information and updating our webpage about these funding opportunities.

- [Covid-19 funding webpage](#)

Operational issues

Ultimately, the decisions as to how to maintain clinics' services at this time are for clinics; however, we do urge clinics to adopt safe approaches for all clinic staff, volunteers and clients and follow the [latest guidance and recommendations from Government and Public Health England](#). Please note that [Government advice is that](#)

[businesses and workplaces should encourage work at home where possible](#), but this situation is changing as the months progress.

- **April update:** In practice we do not think it safe, practical or possible for clinics in the LawWorks Clinics Network to be offering face-to-face advice appointments under the full lockdown restrictions; we therefore recalibrated the [clinics search function](#) on our website. The search function now only contains clinics that are able to offer advice by phone, email and digitally, but will be kept under review.
- **May update:** Government [guidance for workplaces](#) was updated on May 15th, it includes new [specific guidance](#) for people who work in or run offices, [retail](#), contact centres and similar indoor environments, including minimising visits, re-enforcing social distancing requirements, and protecting vulnerable people. Currently, the guidance still says that everyone should work from home, unless they cannot. Revised government guidance has also been issued for [educational](#) settings, [health and social care](#) settings, and [drug and alcohol](#) services.
- **June update:** Government guidance is being updated throughout the month in order to start the process of easing the lockdown restrictions, we suggest you regularly [check this guidance](#) in planning how your clinic can operate; there have been some new [FAQ's issued on public and work activity](#). Some non-essential services start to re-open at end of the month under new guidelines, and the situation is evolving. However, currently the guidance still recommends homeworking at this time.
- **July update:** Government [guidance on working safely during coronavirus](#) has been updated, including [new guidance on reopening of businesses and venues](#) from July 4th, July 25th and 1st August, and there is now new guidance covering twelve workplace settings including [offices and contact centres](#) and guidance for the [safe use of community facilities](#). The social care institute for excellence (SCIE) has also produced a useful [guide on restarting community-based face to face services](#).

Risk assessments

Before re-opening premises or restarting face to face services, organisations must ensure the safety of their workplace by carrying out a risk assessment in line with HSE guidance.

LawWorks has produced a dedicated resource to support clinics with this process.

- [Risk Assessment resource](#)

Hygiene and people in the clinic premises

If you are maintaining a physical clinic, this may be obvious, but it cannot be stressed enough that hygiene is key to help prevent the spread of COVID-19: Please refer to Public Health England Guidance, especially guidance on handwashing. There is also new guidance on wearing face coverings. The following posters, materials and resources can be downloaded and displayed.

- [Public Health England – posters, resources and public information materials](#)

Social distancing

If you are maintaining a physical clinic you should look at the [latest guidance and advice on social distancing - gov.uk](#).

Relying on virtual / remote communication where possible

There are now many options that enable people and organisations to work and interact remotely. If you are not continuing with or planning to reopen a physical clinic and back office support, and are moving to remote working arrangements. LawWorks have produced a dedicated resource to support clinics moving to an online/remote service.

- [Guidance to support moving to an online/remote service](#)

Training and events

Most organisations have adapted their training offer and requirements in this period. LawWorks for example is only providing training that can be run remotely and safely, and will not run face-to-face training sessions for the rest of the year. Recordings, resources and videos from recent remote training sessions can be viewed online; they include Covid-19 specific training on welfare benefits, employment rights, housing repossessions, discrimination and data protection.

- [LawWorks remote training resources](#)

If organising your own training please follow the [latest advice from the Government](#).

Here are some tips for running online events as an alternative

- [How to shift your conference online in light of coronavirus](#)
- [The common-sense guide to coronavirus and events](#)

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If you have any comments or suggestions to include in this guidance please email info@lawworks.org.uk