

COVID-19: Guidance for managing Traveller sites, unauthorised encampments and supporting people living on canal boats

Friends, Families and Travellers | 19th March 2020

Background

This guidance will assist local authorities, Traveller site managers and organisations managing canals and waterways in addressing coronavirus (COVID-19) within home settings for people living on unauthorised encampments, people living on Traveller sites and people living on canals.

This guidance may be updated in line with the changing situation.

What you need to know

- to minimise risk during this national emergency, unauthorised encampments should not be evicted.
- if an individual living on an unauthorised encampment becomes unwell, the local authority will need to support the household to self-isolate safely by stopping evictions, ensuring the household has a place to stop and access to basic water, sanitation and rubbish disposal
- rules on continuous cruising should be lifted so that individuals living on a canal boat have a safe place to moor, and if they become ill they may need additional support to self-isolate
- if an individual living on a Traveller site becomes unwell, the site manager will need to support the household to self-isolate by ensuring all communal bathrooms are accessible and clean, the household is able to top up their electricity and consider whether there is a need for other site residents are aware
- if an individual living on a canal boat becomes unwell, the organisation managing the waterway will need to support the household to self-isolate by lifting any rules on continuous cruising and ensuring the household has a safe place to moor
- if a nomadic household becomes unwell and is stopping on a holiday camp site, they should be allowed to stay or the local authority should identify a safe space for the household to stop
- if a member of staff becomes unwell on site with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature, they should be sent home
- staff, residents and visitors should be reminded to wash their hands for 20 seconds, more frequently and catch coughs and sneezes in tissues
- local authority public health, housing and social care teams are encouraged to work closely together to identify appropriate local solutions for people who don't have anywhere to self-isolate.

Symptoms

The most common symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) are a new, continuous cough or a high temperature.

For most people, coronavirus (COVID-19) will be a mild infection.

Considerations for unauthorised encampments and continuous cruising during the covid19 outbreak

To minimise risk during this national emergency, unauthorised encampments should not be evicted and continuous cruising rules should be lifted on all canals and waterways. New evictions from social or private rented accommodation are to be suspended during this national emergency, the same principles should apply to unauthorised encampments and continuous cruisers. You will need to:

- Ensure that all households know they will not be threatened with eviction.
- Ensure that all households know that rules of continuous cruising have been lifted.
- Ensure that all households have access to basic water and sanitation.

Local authorities are encouraged to adopt a [Negotiated Stopping approach to engaging with unauthorised encampments](#) at this time.

What to do if someone develops symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) while living on an unauthorised encampment

If an individual living on an unauthorised encampment becomes unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature they need to be isolated. People who are living on an unauthorised encampment will need support from their local authority in order to follow Government guidance on self-isolation. You will need to:

- Ensure that all households know they will not be threatened with eviction while self-isolating.
- Ensure that all households have access to basic water and sanitation.
- Ensure that all households have access to rubbish disposal.
- Ensure the household knows they should not be travelling whilst in self-isolation.
- Identify a location where the household can stop where they are able to open the doors of their vehicle and get out, as otherwise they may be in a very confined space for their period of self-isolation.

Local authorities are encouraged to adopt a [Negotiated Stopping approach to engaging with unauthorised encampments](#) at this time.

By nature, people living on unauthorised encampments often live in small, confined homes where it can be difficult to self-isolate. It is likely that people living within a bricks and mortar household will infect each other, however the risk is much higher for those in small homes such as vans or touring caravans.

Where a person with symptoms shares a household with any vulnerable individual (such as older people, pregnant women or those with underlying health conditions), they should be advised to move the individual out of their home, to stay with friends or family for the

duration of the home isolation period. Where this is not possible, local authorities should help to identify where the vulnerable household member can safely live for this time period.

Be aware that households may struggle to fit all of the supplies they need to self-isolate into their home, so any support that can be given to ensure the household has a secure location, such as a locked box, to store supplies they need would be a great help. Households may have their own box, but may need permission from landowners to keep this next to them.

Local authorities should also keep in mind that nomadic households with no other place to stop sometimes temporarily stop on holiday camping sites. In the case that a nomadic household that needs self-isolate is temporarily living on a holiday camping sites, they should be allowed to stay and the camping sites should put in measures to support the household to self-isolate, where possible. If not, the local authority should identify a safe space for the household to stop.

If anyone needs clinical advice, they should go online to NHS 111 (or call 111 if they don't have internet access). In an emergency, call 999 if they are seriously ill or injured or their life is at risk. Do not visit the GP, pharmacy, urgent care centre or a hospital.

If a member of staff has helped someone who was taken unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature, they do not need to go home unless they develop symptoms themselves. They should wash their hands for 20 seconds thoroughly after any contact with someone who is unwell.

What to do if someone develops symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) while living on a Traveller site

If a resident on either a permanent or transit Traveller site becomes unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature they need to be isolated. People who are living on Traveller sites, whether local authority owned or private, will need support from their site manager in order to follow Government guidance on self-isolation. You will need to:

- Ensure the person with symptoms of coronavirus and their household has access to communal toilets and showers when they need them, without coming into contact with others. This can be established using a rota.
- Ensure that communal toilets and showers are adequately cleaned, in particular, after being used by a person with symptoms of coronavirus.
- Ensure that a household that is self-isolating can top up their electricity supply without leaving their home.
- Ensure that a household has enough space to store supplies they may need for their self-isolation, if there is not enough space to store these within their home.
- Ensure households where one or more people with symptoms of coronavirus are not asked to leave the site.
- Consider whether other residents of the Traveller site need to be aware that a resident has symptoms of coronavirus in order to take relevant precautions.

It is likely that people living within a bricks and mortar household will infect each other, however the risk is much higher for those in small homes such as chalets or static caravans. Where a person with symptoms shares a household with any vulnerable individual (such as older people, pregnant women or those with underlying health conditions), they should be advised to move the individual out of their home, to stay with friends or family for the duration of the home isolation period. Where this is not possible, local authorities should help to identify where the vulnerable household member can safely live for this time period.

In light of the confined nature of many chalets and/or static caravans, site managers should identify an outdoor space which people self-isolating can access without coming into contact with others, if possible.

Be aware that households may struggle to fit all of the supplies they need to self-isolate into their home, so any support that can be given to ensure the household has a secure location, such as a locked box, to store supplies they need would be a great help. Households may have their own box, but may need permission from the site manager to keep this next to them.

If someone is unwell, they should minimise visiting shared spaces such as bathrooms as much as possible, and keep shared spaces well ventilated if possible. They should aim to keep 2 metres from other people.

If toilet or bathroom facilities are shared, they should use a separate bathroom if possible. The bathroom should be cleaned and disinfected using your regular cleaning products before being used by anyone else.

If a separate bathroom is not available, consideration should be given to drawing up a rota for washing or bathing, with the person who is unwell using the facilities last, before thoroughly cleaning the bathroom themselves (if they are able or it is appropriate).

If anyone needs clinical advice, they should go online to NHS 111 (or call 111 if they don't have internet access). In an emergency, call 999 if they are seriously ill or injured or their life is at risk. Do not visit the GP, pharmacy, urgent care centre or a hospital.

If a member of staff has helped someone who was taken unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature, they do not need to go home unless they develop symptoms themselves. They should wash their hands for 20 seconds thoroughly after any contact with someone who is unwell.

It is not necessary to close the Traveller site or send any staff home, unless government policy changes. Keep monitoring the website for the latest details.

What to do if someone develops symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) while living on a canal boat

If an individual living on a canal boat or waterway becomes unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature they need to be isolated. People who are living on a canal boat will need support from the organisation managing the canal or waterway in order to follow Government guidance on self-isolation. You will need to:

- Lift any rules related to continuous cruising.
- Ensure the household have access to basic water and sanitation.
- Ensure the household are easily able to empty their cassette, without coming into contact with others.
- Advise the household to stop travelling for the self-isolation period and identify a location where they can moor while self-isolating.

In choosing a location where the household can moor, the organisation managing the waterway should consider:

- whether a household are able to turn the engine on to heat water if needed, without coming into contact with a member of the public,
- whether a household are able to access their coal or wood storage if needed, without coming into contact with a member of the public.
- whether a household has a secure location, such as a locked box, to store supplies they may need for their self-isolation, if there is not enough space to store these within their home.

By nature, people living on boats often live in small, confined homes where it can be difficult to self-isolate. It is likely that people living within a bricks and mortar household will infect each other, however the risk is much higher for those on a boat.

Where a person with symptoms shares a household with any vulnerable individual (such as older people, pregnant women or those with underlying health conditions), they should be advised to move the individual out of their home, to stay with friends or family for the duration of the home isolation period. Where this is not possible, local authorities should help to identify where the vulnerable household member can safely live for this time period.

In light of the confined nature of living on a boat, organisations managing canals and waterways should identify an outdoor space which people self-isolating can access without coming into contact with others, if possible.

Be aware that households may struggle to fit all of the supplies they need to self-isolate into their home, so any support that can be given to ensure the household has a secure location, such as a locked box, to store supplies they need would be a great help. Households may have their own box, but may need permission from the canal or waterway management organisation to keep this next to them.

If anyone needs clinical advice, they should go online to NHS 111 (or call 111 if they don't have internet access). In an emergency, call 999 if they are seriously ill or injured or their life is at risk. Do not visit the GP, pharmacy, urgent care centre or a hospital.

If a member of staff has helped someone who was taken unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature, they do not need to go home unless they develop symptoms themselves. They should wash their hands for 20 seconds thoroughly after any contact with someone who is unwell.

Specific considerations for populations living on unauthorised encampments, on a Traveller site or on a boat

Gypsy and Traveller communities are known to face some of the most severe health inequalities and poor life outcomes amongst the United Kingdom population, even when compared with other socially deprived or excluded groups, and with other ethnic minorities¹.

In the largest piece of research of its kind in the UK, Parry et al found that Gypsies and Travellers were significantly more likely to have a long-term illness, health problem or disability, which limits daily activities or work; experience higher overall prevalence of reported chest pain and higher levels of respiratory problems².

This means that within Gypsy and Traveller communities, there is a disproportionately high representation of people who are at increased risk of severe illness from coronavirus (COVID-19). Responses from local authorities, Traveller site managers and organisations who manage waterways should mirror the level of risk experienced by these groups.

Friends Families and Travellers have created [guidance for people living roadside, on Traveller sites and living on canal boats who need to self-isolate](#), including an audio version for people with low literacy.

Cleaning and waste

Advice on [cleaning and disinfection of settings which are similar to a healthcare setting](#), is available. There is separate [guidance available for non-healthcare settings](#).

If there has been a confirmed or suspected case on an unauthorised encampment, on a Traveller site or on a canal/waterway, managers may wish to discuss which guidance is most appropriate to their setting with their [local Public Health England Health Protection Team](#).

¹ Parry et al (2007) 'Health status of Gypsies and Travellers in England'. J Epidemiol Community Health. 2007 Mar; 61(3): 198–204.

² Ibid