

We've all seen coronavirus (or COVID-19) in the headlines. You may be feeling anxious about what the next few months will bring for you and those around you. At Parkinson's UK we're here to support people living with Parkinson's. We're also here to support you in your role as volunteers.

Every day, I see the way that people work together across the charity in a supportive, friendly and collaborative way to support people living with Parkinson's. I know that we'll work through this difficult time together. We have a fantastic team of volunteers leading our local groups but I know that you'll all be feeling a heavy responsibility to support your members through the challenges that many will inevitably face. I want to assure you that the charity will do all that it can to support you through these times.

To support you in the short term, we've provided facts and guidance to help answer some of the most common questions about coronavirus and Parkinson's [on our website](#). This advice for people affected by Parkinson's follows Government and NHS recommendations in the four countries within the UK.

- England - follow advice from the [NHS](#) and [Government](#)
- Wales - follow advice from [Public Health Wales](#)
- Scotland - follow advice from [NHS Inform](#) and [Government](#)
- Northern Ireland - follow advice from [Public Health Agency](#)

I want to reassure you that we don't expect you to volunteer if you believe it will put your health or someone else's health at risk.

If you decide not to volunteer at this time- either under medical advice or for any of your own reasons - please let your staff contact or our volunteering team know.

[Advice on volunteer and local group events](#)

Our advice, where groups of people are coming together, is that you cancel your activities as a precaution. This includes AGMs, Working Together days, and other volunteer-led activities.

For people with Parkinson's, there's no increased risk of catching coronavirus. However, the advice for slowing the spread of the virus does include staying away from vulnerable individuals, such as elderly people and people with underlying health conditions. And, as volunteers you are likely to be in contact with these groups.

[What does this mean for me?](#)

As a volunteer directly involved in running groups, activities and meetings, we're asking you to cancel your activities for now. In these uncertain and unsettling times developments are evolving and we'll keep you up to date as our advice changes.

I know that this is a big decision, and we're here to help. Your local staff member can support you to let attendees of meetings or activities know about the cancellation, and we can help you with any email you need to send, or by making phone calls.

We'll update the local group and activity information on the Parkinson's UK website to let people know activities aren't happening right now. I know how much time and effort goes into what you do. So, the group listings will stay visible so that people can see what will be available once we're through this difficult time, and how to stay in touch with you.

[What do I need to do?](#)

As well as letting attendees know the meeting is cancelled, there are a few other considerations.

Where you have hired a venue, or have a contract in place for activities; for example a group yoga class, please contact the venue to let them know of the cancellation. The venue may have a cancellation policy in place, due to the current situation, but you may need to check the cancellation policy on your booking agreement. Your local staff member can help you to liaise with the provider if you need support.

I understand this time of year for many people means looking ahead to group outings and holidays. Thinking about the future, please do consider cancelling outings or holidays booked up until the end of July. Contact coach companies, venues or trip organisers as soon as possible because there may be a financial loss involved with cancelling a holiday at this late stage.

Where you are concerned about a financial loss involved with cancelling a holiday [Annabel Theaker](#) (0207 963 3929) in our Local Networks Team can support you.

As Government advice surrounding travel is a constantly changing picture, you may want to consider if you will go ahead with holidays or trips later this year and check the policy of the provider you have booked with.

[Should I cancel any other volunteer activity?](#)

If your volunteer role means you're with vulnerable people, we advise you not to undertake your role. We advise all volunteer educators to stop in-person sessions until further notice.

[Should branch AGMs take place?](#)

You may still be due to hold your AGM before the end of March. If your AGM is affected, you'll need to let your branch membership know that the event is cancelled. You'll also need to confirm to your membership that any volunteers who have been proposed ahead of time (where the positions are not contested) will become the new committee from the planned AGM date.

If you have multiple candidates for these roles, please contact your Network Support Officer or Volunteer Coordinator who can support you before you contact members.

Once meetings are up and running again, you can undertake any outstanding AGM

business. If you have any questions or concerns in the meantime, please contact your Network Support Officer, or Volunteer Coordinator.

[Staying connected](#)

We know that the support and friendship you offer is so important to people in your communities. Your staff contact will make every effort to stay in touch by phone with you and other volunteers. We're all thinking creatively and flexibly and can help you to run meetings using teleconferencing or video call - I am sure you will be checking on people this way too. Our Services Director Katherine Crawford, is available on 07876 135825 or on kcrawford@parkinsons.org.uk if you have any immediate concerns.

We're all conscious of minimising the spread of this virus, so I'd advise you to avoid making home visits in your volunteering role. Where someone needs urgent support with shopping or collection of medication, you may wish to help. Ideally, any bags should be left at the door to avoid entering the house.

If anyone you're in contact with is concerned about their health or of someone close to them, please visit the NHS 111 website. And please make sure that your members know that the charity is here to support them during this difficult time. They can contact our helpline on 0808 800 0303. It's the first port of call for advice or to be put in touch with a local adviser. This may also be a good time for people to discover the support of our online community [via the forum](#).

Please do contact me if you'd like to talk about anything raised in this update.

Best wishes,
Steve Ford

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