

Impact on health and social care workforce

25. There will likely be an impact on workforce absence across the health and care sector, as individuals isolate themselves or need more time to care for family members. Modelling is ongoing to understand the potential scale. Mitigations will need to build on the existing preparations e.g. use of retirees and volunteers.

Mental health

26. We are exploring what additional mental health support needs to be put in place to support self-isolation and social distancing. This will need to include: general advice for the public about how to look after their own mental health and support others in a time of heightened anxiety; shifting some regular mental health support to digital or telephone (e.g. IAPT sessions); scaling up community and third sector mental health support, including joint working with NHS crisis teams, to support those required to self-isolate; and supporting mental health trusts with their contingency planning in event of an outbreak and/or significant staff shortages. We are working with MIND and other charities to explore how their existing support offers (e.g. we understand MIND may have up to 100,000 peer support workers offering digital support) could be rapidly scaled up and made available to a wide range of people.

27. We will need to consider in particular the impact on people with dementia who tend to be older and therefore more vulnerable, but are also at heightened risk of loss of wellbeing if deprived of social company and may not consent to isolation. There will also be particular issues for individuals with learning disabilities and/or autism, some of whom have greater susceptibility to respiratory diseases but are also at heightened risk of experiencing mental distress if isolated/may not understand why they are being isolated. We will need to ensure local services identify these particularly vulnerable individuals and put in place tailored support packages.

Food deliveries

28. Defra is working with the food industry on their contingency plans for managing food supply, including what support the supermarkets can offer to vulnerable members of the community who need to self-isolate.

29. Communication to members of the public is also a key issue and needs very careful handling not to create or exacerbate food supply issues. Defra is liaising closely with supermarkets to co-ordinate an appropriate strategy.

Personal finances and employment

30. All interventions set out above will require a larger pool of individuals to not go into work than has been the case, and in some cases, for longer.