

**COVID-19 PREPAREDNESS**  
**PROTOCOL FOR MOVING FROM CONTAIN TO DELAY**  
**Civil Contingencies Secretariat - version 8 March 2020**

**1. Aim**

To ensure coordination on the communication of a decision to move from the 'CONTAIN' to the 'DELAY' phase of the response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

**2. Background**

In the event of the COVID-19 outbreak worsening, or a severe prolonged pandemic, the coordinated focus of the response of the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations will move from 'CONTAINING' (preventing the disease from taking hold in the UK), to 'DELAYING' (and flattening the peak of the outbreak in the UK).

SAGE (Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies) advice currently suggests that there is now an increased likelihood, that in the next 1-2 weeks, the UK will need to move to the DELAY phase. It is essential that this move is communicated clearly to the public and those involved in the response. This will avoid the possibility of misunderstandings between administrations and within the UK government - which could result in different administrations or UK government departments taking actions prematurely - and confusion in public messaging.

Therefore UK and DA ministers have agreed that the decision to move from CONTAIN to DELAY should be centrally coordinated prior to any external communication.

**3. Protocol**

**a. Scientific Advice**

- The decision to move to the DELAY phase must be based on scientific advice (from SAGE and PHE) and be jointly recommended by the UK Chief Medical Officer (CMO) and the Government Chief Scientific Adviser (GCSA), working in concert with the CMOs of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- From 9 March 2020, the CMO and GCSA will discuss each day at 0900 to agree whether to trigger the shift to DELAY. CMO will be responsible for consulting his counterparts in the Devolved Administrations as necessary.
- The default position will be no change. If the CMO and GCSA recommend moving to DELAY - CMO's office will (by 0930) inform CCS.

**b. Ministerial Decision**

Following this notification, CCS will update No10, DHSC and lead officials in the DAs and will convene a ministerial COBR for later that same day (or add to the agenda of an already scheduled COBR).

At this COBR, UK and DA Ministers will be asked to agree the move from CONTAIN to DELAY - they will take into account:

- Scientific advice
- Readiness to implement
- Communications readiness
- Any other pertinent factors

Note: the only exception to this process would be if COBR had specifically pre-agreed the actions to be taken triggered by the CMO/GCSA recommendation and agreed that it did not need to be further consulted. That is not the case at 8 March.

### **c. Public Communication**

If ministers agree to this change, then the need to make a public announcement should also be agreed.

The public announcement on the decision to move from CONTAIN to DELAY will be made by No10/Prime Minister (coordinated by the Central Communications Hub). The public communications should clearly explain both why the shift is necessary and how the move will help reduce impact on individuals in the UK. At COBR Ministers will also decide collectively whether or not there should be further communications activities by DA Ministers,

This announcement should be supported by more detailed communications (coordinated by the Central Comms Hub) that set out:

- What this means in practice (for individuals - using case studies for different groups and types of families) and what action they should take.
- What the wider impact on the public will be; including specific instruction on whether individual behaviours should change, advice to employers (if different from existing advice).
- What impact this may have on public services (e.g. schools to close), and any additional powers now available to the government.

**Prior to this public announcement any external discussion of the move must remain embargoed.**

### **Devolved Administrations**

CMO's office will ensure Devolved Administration CMOs have a shared understanding of the evidence base supporting the recommendation to COBR. DA

ministers will dial into the COBR(M) and be part of the decision making process informed by briefing from their respective CMOs.

### Foreign Governments and International Organisations

Where COBR has agreed to share information on significant shifts in domestic position between the UK and foreign governments or other international partners, those partners will be informed in advance of the public announcement of the move from CONTAIN to DELAY by the lead department responsible. International partners should be asked to make no public comment before the UK announcement has been made.

**Table 1 - Move to DELAY Protocol**

	Step	CCS/CO Action
1	CMO and GSCA make joint recommendation to move to DELAY phase, with the input of SAGE, PHE and DA CMOs as appropriate.  This decision will be made at 0900 each day. The default position will be no change.	CCS to update No10, DHSC and DAs on the recommendation.  CCS to convene a COBR(M) - if one is not already scheduled for that same day.
2	COBR (M) to discuss and decide whether to agree with UK CMO and GSCA's recommendation to move to DELAY.	CCS to circulate actions and decisions noting communications embargo until after No10/Prime Minister's statement, and any concurrent statements by DA Ministers.  Relevant foreign governments and other international organisations with whom the UK has an information-sharing agreement will be informed, on the basis that they will not make the information public before the UK does.
3	No10/Prime Minister to make a public statement. Potentially at a press conference with the CMO and GSCA.  and  COVID-19 Comms Hub will announce the move to DELAY	Comms Hub to coordinate with OGDs on messaging.

<p>through Gov.uk channels and Press Release.</p> <p>DA Ministers may also make statements</p>	
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#### **4. Interaction with Behavioural and Social Interventions**

The trigger for implementing 'behavioural and social interventions' is not necessarily the move to DELAY phase - for some measures it may be, for others the appropriate triggers may be other factors.

However, should CMO and GSCA recommend a move to DELAY before COBR has agreed the approach that will be taken to implementing 'behavioural and social interventions' (expected 11 March), the COBR(M) meeting that makes the decision on whether to move to DELAY will also need to consider and discuss 'behavioural and social interventions' implementation readiness (as per the flowchart below).

