



HM Courts & Tribunals Service

COVID-19: HMCTS planning and preparation

An update for professional court users

- HMCTS is responsible for the operational running of courts and tribunals and is jointly accountable to the Lord Chancellor and the independent judiciary.
- We routinely review our business continuity plans to ensure we can respond to and continue our work in extraordinary circumstances, including public health outbreaks.
- During this phase of the COVID-19 outbreak, you should continue to use courts and tribunals as usual. Any changes to individual hearings will be communicated directly to those affected in the usual way.
- We have a flexible system – and a flexible workforce - designed to ensure that access to justice can be maintained throughout the most challenging of times.
- We will work with you and the wider justice system to play our part in responding to emerging issues.

Government plans and preparedness

The Government's approach is data-led and informed by medical science.

The Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) maintains primary operational leadership of the medical information and response to the virus.

Read the latest information about the [Government's response and plans](#).

Public health advice

COVID-19 is a new illness that can affect your lungs and airways. It's caused by a virus called coronavirus.

Follow the latest information about [prevention, treatment and travel](#).

Well-established business continuity plans

We have well-established business continuity plans in place to ensure we can continue to deliver key services, protect the public and maintain confidence in the justice system.

We routinely review and test our plans, and this work is underway against the Government's phased framework:

- Contain phase
- Delay phase
- Research phase
- Mitigate phase

Technology may also play a vital part in continuing the smooth running of the courts and tribunals, with judges able to consider audio or video links in a number of circumstances.

This includes for example where a defendant does not need to attend in person on application to appeal refusal of bail in the crown court, or in preliminary and enforcement hearings.

HMCTS priorities

HMCTS is responsible for the operational running of courts and tribunals. It is jointly accountable to the Lord Chancellor and the independent judiciary.

In managing our response to COVID-10, our priorities are to:

- Support decisions and directions made by the judiciary.
- Play our part in the cross-government and justice system-wide plans to deliver key services, protect the public and maintain confidence in the justice system
- Support courts sittings and answer public enquiries.
- Minimise disruption.
- Work with partners and stakeholders to deliver priorities.
- Monitor and subsequently manage any arrears of work that could accumulate in the worst-case scenario.

Coming to court

You should continue to use courts and tribunals as usual.

Any changes to individual hearings will be communicated, in the usual way, directly to those affected.

We've updated our entering courts and tribunals security policy. You can now bring hand sanitiser into our buildings – our court security officers will ask you to use it to prove it's not harmful.

Government [guidance is available for workplaces](#). Although courts and tribunals are not businesses, the principles should be applied to the work of courts and tribunals. This includes the approach to take on wearing facemasks and what to do if someone is suspected of having the virus.

We will follow this Government-wide advice in relation to managing our buildings and making decisions about keeping them open.

What to do if you, or a member of your party, cannot attend court

If you, or someone you are representing, cannot attend court for medical reasons please contact the court where the hearing is due to take place.

How we will update you about the impact of COVID-19 on courts and tribunals

If there are wider changes to the operational running of the courts this will be communicated in the first instance on HMCTS digital channels:

- [Courts & Tribunal Finder](#), an online searchable database of all courts and tribunals

- GOV.UK rolling update page.
- Twitter @HMCTSGovuk and @MoJGovUK.

Ends

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