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Press release

Police given new powers and support to respond to coronavirus

New public health regulations will strengthen enforcement powers to reduce the spread of coronavirus, protect the NHS and save lives.

Published 26 March 2020

From:

Home Office (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/home-office>) and The Rt Hon Priti Patel MP (<https://www.gov.uk/government/people/priti-patel>)



The government has today (26 March 2020) made new public health regulations strengthening police enforcement powers in England, to reduce the spread of coronavirus, protect the NHS and save lives.

To ensure people stay at home and avoid non-essential travel, from today, if members of the public do not comply the police may:

- instruct them to go home, leave an area or disperse

- ensure parents are taking necessary steps to stop their children breaking these rules
- issue a fixed penalty notice of £60, which will be lowered to £30 if paid within 14 days
- issue a fixed penalty notice of £120 for second time offenders, doubling on each further repeat offence

Individuals who do not pay a fixed penalty notice under the regulations could be taken to court, with magistrates able to impose unlimited fines.

If an individual continues to refuse to comply, they will be acting unlawfully, and the police may arrest them where deemed proportionate and necessary.

However, in the first instance the police will always apply their common sense and discretion.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

The Prime Minister has been clear on what we need to do: stay at home to protect our NHS and save lives. All our frontline services really are the best of us and are doing an incredible job to stop this terrible virus from spreading.

That's why I'm giving the police these new enforcement powers, to protect the public and keep people safe.

In addition to the new powers, a package of support has been unveiled to boost police resources.

Around 1,500 additional police officers have already joined forces across England and Wales since September 2019 as a result of the police recruitment campaign.

Today, the government is leading by example and will ensure that existing Civil Servants who are already volunteering as Special Constables are able to assist in the national effort to the greatest extent possible.

Additionally, in recognition of their value and expertise and in order to increase capacity and resilience, the government has committed to relaxing tax and pensions rules which could deter officers nearing retirement and those recently retired from returning to serve.

The government is also speaking to the Security Industry Authority about what more they can do to encourage the private security sector to support the national response.

The Home Office has been working with police and fire services to understand their requirements for Personal Protective Equipment over the coming months. The National Police Chiefs' Council has confirmed that police currently have a good supply and they are overseeing distribution to forces but the government will continue to work with them to ensure that emergency service workers can get the equipment they need, when they need it, in order to carry out their jobs safely.

Individuals will only be allowed to leave their home for the following very limited purposes:

- shopping for basic necessities, as infrequently as possible
- one form of exercise a day - for example, a run, walk or cycle - alone or with members of their household
- any medical need, to provide care or to help a vulnerable person
- travelling to and from work, but only where they cannot work from home

Participating in gatherings of more than two people in public spaces is also not permitted except in very limited circumstances, for example, where it is for essential work purposes.

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