Due to the impact Covid-19 is having on operations across the UK we have had to reduce our phoneline opening hours.

Our phonelines are open on Monday, Wednesday and Friday between 10 am and 4 pm.

The contact us service is also available for answers to common questions and we will aim to respond to these enquiries as quickly as possible.

If you have a question about your gambling, or the gambling of someone close to you, our Guidance and FAQs page may provide valuable information. Our what we do page also provides an overview of the types of queries we are able to help consumers with in the first instance.

The National Gambling Helpline is also available 24 hours a day, seven days a week through GamCare. It is there to support those suffering from gambling problems or those concerned about the affect gambling is having on people close to them. You can call them free on 0808 8020 133, or visit gamcare.org.uk.

The Gambling Commission has today issued new guidance for online operators. It ensures that consumers are further protected following the publication of new evidence that shows some gamblers maybe at greater risk of harm during lockdown. Included in the guidance is the need for affordability checks, prevention of reverse withdrawals and restrictions on bonus offers.

The new guidance follows the Commission publishing data showing the impact that Covid-19 is having on consumers and the industry so far. Collected through the gambling industry and also through YouGov surveys this data shows that during lockdown gambling participation is down overall.
reflects the closure of land based venues and the cancellation of sporting events, with only a small number of people starting to gamble for the first time.

However, while there is no evidence to suggest an increase in problem gambling, the shift in the market as a result of Covid-19 evidence shows an increase in the use of certain gambling products such as online slots, poker, casino gaming and virtual sports.

The majority of those gambling indicate that they have not increased the time or money they have spent, two thirds (64%) of more engaged gamblers\[1\] reported that they have increased the time or money that they are spending on at least one online gambling activity including National Lottery products. [2]

The data also shows that in terms of time spent gambling, while overall session length has decreased, there has been an increase in the number of sessions that are played for over an hour.

The Commission has reviewed its current guidance in light of the risks that some players may be experiencing harm while in lockdown, and online operators must now take account of the Commission’s additional guidance, which makes clear they should:

- Prevent reverse withdrawal options for customers until further notice [3]
- Cease to offer bonuses or promotions to all customers who are displaying indicators of harm
- Interact with customers who have been playing for an hour in a single session of play
- Review thresholds and triggers for new customers to reflect the operator’s lack of knowledge of that individual’s play and spend patterns
- Conduct affordability assessments for individuals picked up by existing or new thresholds and triggers which indicate consumers experiencing harm - limiting or blocking further play until those checks have been concluded and supporting evidence obtained, and;
- Implement processes that ensure the continual monitoring of their customer base – identifying patterns of play, spend or behaviours have changed in recent weeks.

Online operators will be expected to make changes to act on this guidance as soon as possible. The Commission will bring forward plans to consult on whether further targeted player protection measures are required on a permanent basis.
Gambling Commission chief executive Neil McArthur said:

“Operators must use the data they hold to protect their customers and now, more than ever, it’s vital that online operators really know their customers by monitoring how long they are playing for and understanding how financial uncertainty is impacting them and what they can afford to gamble with. To ensure operators do that, we are strengthening our guidance and expect operators to take account of that to prevent bonus offers or inducements being offered to customers who are showing any sign of harm.”

Work was already underway to address many of these issues but this means we will now accelerate this work due to the unique situation that many consumers will find themselves in during lockdown.

“We will continue to monitor and publish the data that we are collecting and we will take further measures if required. We are monitoring online operators closely and if we see irresponsible behaviour we will step in immediately, suspending licences if we need to.”

Minister for Sports, Tourism and Heritage Nigel Huddleston said:

"It is vital that people are protected from the threat of gambling related harm and I welcome these latest steps from the Gambling Commission.

“We will continue to monitor the situation closely and will not hesitate to take further action if required.”

Later this month the Commission will be opening a consultation which will propose strengthened measures around ethical product design, including reverse withdrawals and VIP Inducements.

Following the announcement of the lockdown and social distancing measures on 23 March, Mr McArthur also wrote to online operators to remind them of their responsibilities to protect consumers.

Nigel Huddleston MP wrote to gambling operators in April to remind them of their responsibilities during Covid-19, and urged them to give more prominence to safer gambling messages.
Read the Commission’s full report on Covid-19 related data. The data was taken from YouGov’s Covid-19 tracker, a weekly online survey of around 2,000 adults in Great Britain and from submissions of the biggest operators, covering approximately 80% of the online gambling market (noting that it may include some duplication of customer numbers where it is not possible to identify unique customers).

Read the full updated guidance to operators on customer interaction during Covid-19.

Read more about Covid 19 and its impact on gambling.

To help give a clear and more rounded picture of current gambling behaviours, we have taken data from gambling operators.

Read more about the risks arising from Covid-19 and our response.

The National Lottery already has similar protections in place but is monitoring the impact of Covid-19 on player behaviour and updating the Gambling Commission regularly on its approach.

In April the Gambling Commission directed £9m to boost resilience of gambling harm treatment services during Covid-19.

Notes to Editors:
1. *An engaged gambler is someone that has gambled on three or more products in the last week. Of those who gambled in the last four weeks (but not only for the first time), 8% are engaged gamblers (i.e. have gambled on three or more products).
2. Data on increased time/money spent includes playing National Lottery products.
3. Most online operators offer consumers the facility to reverse a request to withdraw funds in their gambling account. Consumers can use this facility to change their decision to end gambling, and either extend their session without taking a break or spend more than they originally intended. The Commission, supported by academic research, lived experience and expert advice, already considers the use of reverse withdrawals as a flag for potential gambling harms.

- Reported changes in time and money spent on online gambling products do not reflect the time and money people were spending prior to lockdown in land-based venues so we do not know what has happened to these individuals’ overall gambling expenditure.

Posted on 12 May 2020
Gambling Commission instructs tighter measures to protect consumers during lockdown