

## **Keeping everyone safe during the Covid-19 emergency – a brief guide for informal community groups**

Safeguarding means protecting the health, wellbeing and human rights of everyone at risk, enabling them to live safely, free from abuse and neglect. It is about people and organisations working together to prevent and reduce both the risks and experience of abuse or neglect.

Everyone acknowledges the uncharted nature of what we are facing we all still have responsibility to be aware of potential risks and to take such measures as are possible to minimise them at all times, even when involved in an informal group rather than an established organisation. This information is intended to help you do that.

### **How do we assess risk?**

The circumstances in which groups, both informal and formal, are operating, the nature of the support they offer and the challenges they face will vary hugely. Also, informal neighbourhood initiatives providing support to neighbours are not registered charities and cannot be expected to have the same levels of protocols and policies. Despite this there are some basic steps which *everyone* can take to assess and minimise risk. These steps are;

1. Identifying hazards
2. Assessing the risk of harm
3. Assessing existing control measures, to see if they are adequate
4. Assessing if extra controls are needed
5. Reviewing later on, to see if the controls are working

Make sure that your volunteers are aware of the guidance given on the government website, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public>

They should not volunteer if they or someone they have been in contact with is unwell.

Ask volunteers to make sure someone knows where they are when they are volunteering and knows who to contact if there is a problem.

### **Do I have to be DBS checked?**

The Disclosure and Barring Scheme (DBS) helps ensure people whose behaviour makes them unsuitable to work with children and protected adults cannot do 'regulated work' with these vulnerable groups. The DBS have produced a factsheet for community volunteers during the Covid-19 outbreak.

There are several support activities which definitely **do not require** a DBS check such as shopping, cash handling, having access to people's details and dog walking. Each



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organisation has to risk assess these activities and consider what other safeguarding measures are appropriate such as supervising new volunteers more closely.

Informal groups of neighbours coming together to support vulnerable people in their community are of course not covered by legislation which formal organisations are legally obliged to follow but it is still important that risk is assessed and such measures as are possible are taken to reduce risk. It would be reasonable for organisers to ask volunteers to show proof of identity and address.

If volunteers are worried that a child or adult they have contact with is unsafe they should contact 999 in an emergency or Adult safeguarding team on 023 8083 2995, email at [SSAB@southampton.gov.uk](mailto:SSAB@southampton.gov.uk)

## **We are doing shopping, what should we know?**

Here's a few basic precautions for handling shopping that could help keep everyone safe. You may want to include these in your safeguarding practices;

- Don't go into any houses. Leave food / goods outside the doorstep. Communicate to the person in isolation that you have delivered via message or phone call. Get confirmation that the person has received it before you leave.
- Check the safety of the products delivered. Check any packaging is sealed and the temperature of product on delivery e.g. If it's meant to be frozen, is it still frozen?
- Recommend that recipients wash shopping wherever possible and wash their hands after touching it.
- Remember to wash hands before and after deliveries. Where possible wash for 20 seconds with soap and water. When out and about keep a bottle of alcohol hand sanitiser to hand.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing and sneezing. If no tissue, cough and sneeze into the crook of your arm.
- Volunteers should ensure they have a low chance of becoming infected. Where possible follow social distancing protocol and don't take unnecessary risks.
- Public transport should be avoided where possible. In cases where taking public transport is unavoidable, disinfection of the items delivered should be carried out.
- Take care when handling any items which may be given to people who may have compromised immune systems. The virus can live on inanimate surfaces for up to 72 hours.
- Disinfect any surface that will be touched by the person you are delivering to.

## **We are picking up prescriptions, what should we know?**

In terms of risk the danger of harm is likely to be high if someone doesn't receive the medication they need. In addition, some of the prescriptions that volunteers may end up collecting have a potential high street value. It is possible that someone could steal them in order to sell them on. It is also possible that due to a dispensing error some prescriptions might be incomplete leaving a volunteer vulnerable to an accusation of theft. It is worth considering the following guidance:

- Prescriptions should be picked up in pairs (while maintaining a social distance)
- Volunteers collecting prescriptions should message organisers when they have collected prescriptions.
- Volunteers should message organisers when they have delivered prescriptions.



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- Organisers should message the requester to confirm they have had their delivery before deleting the request.

- If you collect a prescription, do not advise on doses, preparation or administration of medication even if you have a relevant qualification. This should only be done by the prescriber.
- The same is true for over the counter medications, such as paracetamol and ibuprofen. No advice should be given by volunteers, no matter what you've read. The person requesting over the counter meds must take all responsibility for their request. If buying over the counter then only buy and deliver the maximum amount which can be purchased by one person.

## How do we keep people's personal details safe?

Formal organisations of all types have often very complex data protection policies and procedures in place to ensure they carry out all of their legal responsibilities. However even though informal groups supporting neighbours through this crisis do not have those legal responsibilities they do still have a duty to do what they can to ensure people's personal details are not shared inappropriately. You can do this by:

- Always consider carefully whether someone's details need to be shared before doing so. It's important that information is only ever available to those who really need it to provide support.
- Never publish personal information on public forums such as social media. These forums can be a vital way to connect people at this difficult time but keep any personal information to controlled, private forums such as WhatsApp groups and even then, only if necessary.

## How do we keep everyone's money safe?

Where a shopping recipient (or friend or relative acting on their behalf) is unable to shop online (very few supermarkets now have any slots available), the next option would be for the recipient or their relative to phone a local shop that will take card payments. (The local community group should identify any shops that will take telephone payments and make recipients aware of them). A volunteer could then collect the paid for shopping providing any pre agreed proofs of identify. If that is not possible, and the volunteer must pay for the shopping, the approach will depend on whether the shopping is a private arrangement between neighbours or one organised by a local group.

**Private arrangements:** ideally payments should be made by bank transfer or Paypal to minimise the risk of passing on the virus, but if that's not possible then the recipient could pay by cheque or cash <sup>[1]</sup>. It is not appropriate for volunteers to accept credit/debit cards from people asking for help in order to buy resources on their behalf as this is a safeguarding risk.

**Group arrangements:** where the volunteer has been allocated the shopping task and the group has a bank account it would be best practice for the task allocator to establish how the shopping recipient is able to pay for their shopping. If the recipient can pay online or by telephone banking, payment should be made to the group once the shopping is delivered – this will safeguard the volunteers bank details and the volunteer is then repaid by the group. If this is not possible payment could be made by cheque or by cash to the volunteer. If a shopping recipient does not have access to remote banking, does not have a relative who can help and does not have cheques or cash available the group would reimburse the



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[<sup>1</sup>] The World Health Organisation advised washing hands after handling money but have not issued a warning about using banknotes

volunteer and invoice the shopping recipient on the understanding that payment would become due once their isolation ends.

Prior to reimbursement volunteers should take a photo of each receipt and create a central record of any payments made. There should also be a central record of any concerns raised in respect of payments and make people aware of how they can raise a concern.

Some groups may be in the position to purchase prepaid cards (most larger retailers have them) that volunteers can use so there is no need for them to be out of pocket and the group then seeks payment from the shopping recipient.

[Marks & Spencer](#) and [ASDA](#) have both launched contactless volunteer shopping cards, where the cards are bought online topped up with credit and then a barcode can be emailed to a volunteer which can be used to pay for shopping.

To reduce the risk of fraudsters imitating community volunteers, recipients should not make any payments until the shopping is delivered with a receipt. We also recommend that volunteers do not make purchases larger than £30 per household.

**For further support and advice please contact SVS at  
[volunteer@southamptonvs.org.uk](mailto:volunteer@southamptonvs.org.uk) or call 023 8022 8291**