

Gareth Johnson MP for Dartford

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Coronavirus update - easing the lockdown



Lockdown

We are now in our ninth week of lockdown and we are seeing some signs of how the country will slowly return to some normality. More and more people are returning to work as the peak of the virus has passed, but we cannot be complacent.

Dartford has been hit hard by this pandemic and our proximity to London has led to a significant number of cases locally. Darent Valley Hospital has coped remarkably well with the outbreak and many of our vital services have continued throughout. It will, however, take a long period of time for our local economy to recover and for

things to completely return to normal.

On 10th May, the Prime Minister made a statement which meant that in England, some of the rules changed and a useful link to these can be found by clicking on the video above.



Returning to the House of Commons

This week I returned to the House of Commons to ask the Transport Minister for more support for local rail commuters.

There have been a fairly large number of Dartford's commuters who are not eligible for a refund to their season ticket when it is nearing the end of its valid period. I strongly believe that Southeastern should provide some form of compensation for those people who have not been able to travel due to the current crisis.

A link to my question and the Minister's response can be found by clicking on the video above.



Above - social distancing measures in place at the Houses of Parliament.

southeastern

Southeastern has been operating a reduced timetable throughout the pandemic but from 18th May some additional peak services were introduced and some trains were retimed. This timetable is available in online journey planners and on Southeastern's dedicated coronavirus webpage (links to both can be found below). Southeastern has provided the following information:

Safety and hygiene is our top priority

To help tackle the spread of coronavirus, we're doing more to ensure our trains and stations are clean. We're:

- Increasing our focus on cleaning high-touch areas in trains and at stations using anti-viral cleaning products
- Ensuring toilets are well stocked with soap and water.
- Fully disinfecting all our trains every 7 days with a product that has a 10-day life, with a focus on frequent touch points like door control buttons

Social distancing will continue on trains

As the Government has said, social distancing means there will be space for as few as 1 in 10 of the usual number of passengers on the railway. The safety of the public and our employees remains our top priority and people should help protect everyone on the railway by only using trains if they have no alternative. Those who can work from home should continue to do so. Please help us keep the railway free for those who need it most.

How you can help us

- **Only take public transport if you have no other option**, help us keep the railway free for those who need it most. Consider cycling or walking for your journey if possible.
- **Plan ahead** – avoid peak travel, check before you travel, buy tickets online, on your mobile or on smartcard
- **Consider others** – please wear a face covering, respect our staff, be considerate to those less able
- **Stay safe** – maintain social distancing where possible, use hand sanitiser and wash hands frequently, pay contactless where possible

If you need to travel - buy your ticket online by signing up for **The Key smartcard** before you travel or use contactless, leave plenty of time for your journey, travel off-peak if you can and follow public health advice while travelling.

[Southeastern's journey planner](#)

[Southeastern's Coronavirus travel webpage](#)



Anyone with symptoms can now book a test

The Government has announced that anyone with symptoms of coronavirus is now eligible to book a test, ahead of the rollout of the test and trace service.

The expansion in testing eligibility comes after all 4 UK Chief Medical Officers confirmed that anosmia has been added as a symptom of COVID-19. Anosmia is the

loss of or a change in your normal sense of smell, and it can also affect your sense of taste.

This means people should self-isolate immediately if they have:

- a new, continuous cough
- a high temperature, or
- a loss of or change in their normal sense of smell or taste

All members of their household must also self-isolate according to current guidelines, unless the symptomatic individual receives a negative test result.



Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme extended

In a boost to millions of jobs and businesses, Rishi Sunak has announced the furlough scheme will be extended by a further four months, to 31st October 2020, with workers continuing to receive 80% of their current salary.

From the start of August, furloughed workers will be able to return to work part-time with employers being asked to pay a percentage towards the salaries of their furloughed staff.

The employer payments will substitute the contribution the Government is currently making, ensuring that staff continue to receive 80% of their salary, up to £2,500 a month.

The scheme will continue in its current form until the end of July and the changes to allow more flexibility will come in from the start of August. More specific details and information around its implementation will be made available by the end of this month.

The Government will explore ways through which furloughed workers who wish to do additional training or learn new skills are supported during this period.

The Chancellor's decision to extend the scheme, which will continue to apply across all regions and sectors in the UK economy, comes after the Government outlined its plan for the next phase of its response to the coronavirus outbreak.



Kent Police

I was delighted to see that training of new police officers in Kent has continued during the pandemic. Kent Police has been able to ensure it has a steady stream of new recruits joining its ranks and helping to police our local streets. This socially-distanced passing out parade took place earlier this week.

If you need some extra support as a result of coronavirus and have a mental health condition

Help is available:

- NHS Volunteer Responders are on hand to provide check in and chat phone calls to help prevent loneliness and help people stay connected.
- Certain eligible groups can get support in accessing food, medication and other essential supplies. This includes people with mental health problems.
- To refer yourself or someone else to the NHS Volunteer Responder scheme call 0808 196 3646.

This week is Mental Health Awareness Week. If you need support with your mental health because of coronavirus, it is available at the following link:

<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/>



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