

Frequently Asked Questions

The Coronavirus Pandemic and Changes to the Post Office Network

1) How will the Principles of Community Engagement be applied in view of the confusion arising from the pandemic?

We will, wherever possible, adhere to these principles.

These are unprecedented times. With a network of 11,500 branches and the sheer volume of daily changes this does mean we are not able to give as much notice to our customers about any change to their local Post Office service as we would usually, for which we apologise.

The latest updates can be found on our Consultation Hub, www.postoffice.co.uk.

2) Why is my branch closed and how can I find out what's happening?

Regrettably the wide reaching effects of the coronavirus pandemic may cause branches to close unexpectedly or operate reduced opening hours.

As many branches as possible are staying open. The situation is changing daily, and branches aim to stay open as long as this can be done safely and with appropriate care for vulnerable postmasters and their teams.

For more information about branches in your area visit postoffice.co.uk/branch-finder on the Post Office website and App. This is being updated three times a day by a dedicated team to provide customers with the most up to date information.

3) How long will the branch be closed?

Currently we are not able to confirm how long a branch will be temporarily closed. Things are changing daily and some branches may be able to open on reduced operating hours or days and some may be able to re-open fully without notice, as many have already.

For the most up to date information about a branch please visit postoffice.co.uk/branchfinder on the Post Office website and App.

4) It is clear that Postmasters are the ones who can provide the most accurate information about the re-opening of their branch. How is this being achieved?

We have made it easier for Postmasters to let us know they are re-opening their branch, following a reported closure. Using our Branch Hub, Postmasters can tell us when they have re-opened their branch and this will update in Branch Finder within 24 hours so their customers are aware of the change. postoffice.co.uk/branch-finder

5) The information on your website about the branch closure was unclear to me. Was this Coronavirus-linked or were there other difficulties?

Due to the difficult circumstances surrounding the Coronavirus pandemic, many branches have needed to close or reduce opening hours temporarily. These temporary operational changes are to help manage the impact of the pandemic, which could be due to the need to self-isolate, lack of available safety equipment or reduced availability of staff. To help us advise local representatives as quickly as we possibly can, we have been issuing a more general communication supported by these regularly updated Frequently Asked Questions.

Please be assured that we will continue to communicate in more specific detail regarding any temporary closures not relating to the Coronavirus Pandemic.

6) Why is my branch re-opening delayed and how will it affect me?

To comply with Government guidelines of social distancing we have had to delay some of our planned branch re-openings. This is to ensure the safety of our Post Office colleagues, postmasters and their teams.

Re-openings will be rescheduled as soon as Government guidelines permit us to do so and we will be working hard to restore services to the local community.

7) How long will the re-opening be delayed?

Currently we are not able to confirm how long a branch reopening will be delayed. However we will provide posters in branch as soon as the new date is known.

8) How will I know if the changes planned for my branch will go ahead?

Once we have an update to share, an information letter with full details will be available on our Consultation Hub, www.postoffice.co.uk. You can search the Hub by entering the branch name, code or postcode to access the letter.

9) Will you still be able to take my views into account during the lockdown?

We will be keeping any new consultation or engagement feedback process to a minimum during this period. However our National Consultation Team are working to ensure any feedback received is acted upon in accordance with our Principles of Community Engagement.

10) Will you be making final decisions about your proposals during the lockdown?

The enforced isolation period will not affect any consultation decision currently in process. There will be minimal new consultations and these will only be relating to where we need to consider an otherwise loss of Post Office services to the local community.

11) You state I can use any convenient alternative branch of my choice. What if the alternative branches to my Post Office branch are also closed or too far away?

We understand the frustration experienced in such a case. Clearly this pandemic is having a big impact on all businesses countrywide and things are changing daily. Post Office Limited are reviewing what support and guidance they can give to staff and branches and will continue to do so in the days ahead.

For more information about branches in your area visit the Post Office website postoffice.co.uk/branch-finder

12) What steps has Post Office Ltd taken to ensure continued service for their customers during the pandemic?

Regrettably the wide reaching effects of the coronavirus pandemic may cause branches to close unexpectedly or operate reduced opening hours.

As many branches as possible are staying open. The situation is changing daily, and branches aim to stay open as long as this can be done safely and with appropriate care for vulnerable postmasters and their teams.

We're incredibly proud of our postmasters and branch staff for their dedication to serving customers and keeping the largest retail network in the UK open for business during this difficult time. The situation around the coronavirus pandemic is changing rapidly and undoubtedly there will be some disruption to services. Postmasters are not immune to this virus, and we have a duty to help protect them.

13) Branches are closing or decreasing their hours without warning. I visited my branch only to find it was already closed for the day. How can you minimize the inconvenience of this to the customer?

We understand the frustration experienced in such a case. Clearly this pandemic is having a big impact on all businesses countrywide and things are changing daily. With a network of 11,500 branches and the vast scale of the affected areas, we are not able to give the advanced notice we would usually aim to and for this we apologise.

Post Office Limited are constantly reviewing what support and guidance we can give to staff and branches and will continue to do so in the days ahead.

For more information about branches in your area visit the Post Office website postoffice.co.uk/branch-finder

14) I live in a remote area and rely on the Outreach service for post office services. Are Outreach services liable to be closing at this time also?

Post Offices have been designated an essential service, which means they should stay open to provide a vital lifeline for banking services, benefits, and to enable letters and parcels to be sent – *as long as this can be done safely and with appropriate care for vulnerable postmasters and branch teams.* **This also applies to Outreaches**, which provides Post Office services to isolated communities, provided that the location from which they are being run is not a village hall, community centre, or other public venue or non-essential retail outlet which has been closed based on Government advice.

15) Is Post Office Ltd classed as a key service provider?

Postmasters have been classified by the Government as Key Workers and Post Offices are among the small number of essential services that should stay open – as long as this can be done safely and with appropriate care for vulnerable postmasters and their teams.

16) Postmasters and their staff seem to be exposed to contamination on a higher level while they deal with the public. How is Post Office Ltd seeking to protect their workers and customers to keep them safe during this pandemic?

Post Office branches are coming up with a range of solutions to make sure social distancing can be maintained in branch and have been sharing the measures they've put in place on social media.

In line with other retailers, we are advising a 2 metre (6 foot) distance between customers in the queue and at the counter which can be marked with tape on the floor where appropriate. The guidance is to limit the number of customers in branch if necessary. We have also produced posters on social distancing to display in branch.

We are working hard to make arrangements so that customers can respect social distancing and postmasters have the protective equipment they may need. We are keeping branches updated with the latest advice and guidance through our existing communication channels and a daily email from Retail and Franchise Network Director.

We have provided each of our postmasters with updated guidance on hand washing and hygiene to enable business to continue. We are working closely with Government to secure a supply of hand sanitizer and gloves. However, there are long lead times for these products, given the demand for them in hospitals and elsewhere. In the meantime, we have provided each branch with funds to access local supplies of sanitizer.

Additionally, in the coming days and weeks, we will also be distributing and installing Perspex screens in branches across the network. Each postmaster has also been provided with in-store signage to encourage customers to follow Government guidance on staying two metres apart whilst in branch.

17) There is every likelihood that some branches may use the pandemic as an excuse to close in order to give themselves an unexpected holiday. How do you propose to prevent this?

We believe our postmasters are hardworking professionals who take their livelihoods seriously. It is not in their professional and economic interest to close without good reason and will only do so if it is not deemed safe to remain open.

We're incredibly proud of our postmasters and branch staff for their dedication to serving customers and keeping the largest retail network in the UK open for business during this difficult time. The situation around the coronavirus pandemic is changing rapidly and undoubtedly there will be some disruption to services. Postmasters are not immune to this virus, and we have a duty to help protect them.

18) During the lockdown will I still have access to all the products and services offered by my branch?

We have not made any changes to the product and services offered by your local Post Office branch.

19) Can you clarify what is classed as essential Post Office transactions and essential posting, as defined by the Government's guidelines?

Customers are able to get cash, deposit cheques, pay bills as well as send and collect parcels. These are vital services, particularly for many vulnerable customers. For further information please visit www.postoffice.co.uk/coronavirus

20) Will payments into my account be delayed due to Coronavirus pandemic?

No, payments into your account should be unaffected.

21) I am worried about going to the Post Office to collect my payments, can someone collect my money on my behalf?

You should not give your card and PIN to somebody else to use. You can nominate someone you trust to become a Permanent Agent on your account and this person will be given their own card and PIN to collect cash on your behalf. To nominate a Permanent Agent, please complete the 'Permanent Agent access form' (P6163), available from most Post Office branches.

Please note: You can ask someone to take the form to the Post Office on your behalf as long as the form is complete and has been signed by yourself.

22) What if I have no one to help me collect my payments?

For those who are isolated and without nearby help from family and/or friends, we are continuing to work with DWP to look at other ways in which we can ensure that they can access their accounts nonetheless. In the meantime, if anyone is having trouble accessing their money due to being isolated, they should call the POca helpline on 0345 722 3344 or contact their local authority community hub for assistance.

23) My local Post Office is closed and I need to collect my money?

If your local branch is closed, you can also use a Post Office ATM to withdraw cash from your POca. For more information about branches in your area visit postoffice.co.uk/branch-finder on the Post Office website and App. This is being updated three times a day by a dedicated team to provide customers with the most up to date information.

For further information please visit www.postoffice.co.uk/coronavirus
Or for Royal Mail related questions please visit www.royalmail.com/coronavirus