

COVID-19 – Weekend News Bulletin

21-22 March 2020

Heart of London Business Alliance is committed to ensuring our members receive the support they need while the situation in relation to COVID-19 is fast-changing. Our Daily Bulletin provides you with an update on the important announcements and guidance from the Government. In addition, it is recommended that our members monitor the [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) website for guidance regarding COVID-19.

Together with our local Member of Parliament, Nickie Aiken, Heart of London will continue to lobby Government for support for our members and your employees during this difficult time.

The Prime Minister's Daily Coronavirus Press Conference – 21 March 2020

For the first time since daily Government press conferences began, George Eustice, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs stood in for the Prime Minister. Focusing on his Cabinet brief, the press conference focused on Government efforts to increase resilience in the food supply chain. Mr Eustice was flanked by Helen Dickinson, the Chief Executive of the British Retail Consortium and Professor Stephen Powis, the National Medical Director of NHS England.

- Mr Eustice emphasised that there was no shortage in food supplies. Current difficulties are related only to the increased demand on logistics in the supply chain. The entire UK public has a role to play in making responsible shopping choices to prevent shortages and prevent panic buying.
- Mr Eustice stated conclusively that there was no intent to introduce formal rationing of essential goods. Retailers were best placed to apply restrictions where necessary, taking decisions most appropriate for their own customer base and capabilities.
- Nearly £1 billion had been spent on groceries in the past month over expected demand. This was equivalent to the Christmas growth in demand, however, suppliers have not benefited from the usual foresight in order to prepare.
- Mrs Dickinson stressed that manufacturers have increased production capacity by over 50% and are seeking to increase capabilities still further whilst keeping prices at a competitive level. While specific choices may be reduced in the coming months there will still be plenty of other options available.
- Mr Eustice confirmed that employees in the food supply chain have been designated as “key workers” to ensure that they will be resilient against store closures as the spread of the virus peaks in the UK.
- Mr Eustice also reconfirmed the wavering of restrictions on delivery driver hours; set aside competition laws to allow local coordination between different supermarkets to share resources and staff; and removed plastic bag and online delivery charges.
- Mr Eustice said he was confident that there will be sufficient resilience in as domestic UK food production increases in the warmer months.

Contact julia.swift@heartoflondonbid.co.uk should you have any queries.

The Prime Minister's Daily Coronavirus Press Conference – 22 March 2020

On Sunday, in the latest of the daily press conferences the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, addressed the nation alongside Robert Jenrick, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government and Dr Jenny Harries, the Deputy Chief Medical Officer.

Boris Johnson stated that the Government will take special steps to protect the most vulnerable members of society and that it would bring in special shielding measures.

- The Prime Minister re-iterated the importance of maintain social distancing, adding that the Government will have to bring in stricter measures if necessary.
- Boris Johnson stated that when people interact outdoors it is important to follow the advice and stay two meters apart as the fresh air does not provide immunity to the virus.
- Robert Jenrick laid out the details of the shielding programme. The NHS will contact 1.5 million at risk people to instruct them to stay at home for at least 12 weeks. These individuals will include those that suffer from severe respiratory conditions, cancers, have had organ transplants and take immunosuppressant drugs.
- This programme will establish a network of local hubs across the country to deliver medicines, food and other essentials. This will be delivered in partnership with local pharmacies, local authorities and local businesses. To begin with the services will be free and paid for by the Government with supermarkets supporting the distribution effort. The military are also involved in this effort.
- Individuals who live with an identified vulnerable person or care for them do not have to isolate for 12 weeks but must follow the general social distancing guidance.
- Dr Jenny Harries noted that the scheme is likely to overestimate the number of vulnerable individuals. Therefore, inclusion in the scheme can be reviewed on an individual basis. Similarly, should an individual wish to be involved in the scheme they can contact their local GP.
- Earlier on Sunday the Prime Minister Boris Johnson published a statement to mark Mother's Day telling people not to visit their mothers but to call instead, in an effort to maintain social distancing.
- Additionally, Johnson highlighted how doctors and nurses in Italy have been completely overwhelmed by the impact of Coronavirus and he added that unless we act together the NHS will be facing a similar crisis.

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