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How You Can Help Vulnerable People In The Coronavirus Outbreak

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8-10 minutes

[Coronavirus is dividing the nation](#) between those who have the access and resources to take necessary precautions, and those on low incomes or with other vulnerabilities for whom closures and self-isolation can take a huge toll.

Liam Evans, campaigns officer at Turn2Us, a national charity that helps people in financial hardship, believes there needs to be a

collective move by society – as well as the government – to help those who are vulnerable, especially given the current climate. So what can people do to help?



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1. Shop responsibly.

Panic-buying can affect those on low incomes. Evans cited a corner shop that had increased prices of hand sanitiser from £1 to £7 due to demand. “Those sorts of individual choices have an impact on people on low

incomes who won't be able to afford that," he says. If you overbuy, prices are likely to rise – and this will affect a portion of the population.

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Try to keep it to business as usual, until advice suggests otherwise. This means there's no need to buy more or less than you usually would. Shopping "responsibly" is the key here.

For those worried about having enough supplies in, supermarkets have confirmed they're working with the government and suppliers to keep food moving quickly through the system while also increasing

deliveries to stores.

They urged the public to “be considerate” in the way they shop. “We understand your concerns but buying more than is needed can sometimes mean that others will be left without,” they wrote [in an open letter to the public](#). “There is enough for everyone if we all work together.”

Rather than going to your supermarket, why not shop at a smaller, local store? Small businesses are also vulnerable in the Covid-19 outbreak – and buying your groceries from them, rather than a chain, could make all the difference.

2. Support food and beauty banks.

As cases of coronavirus rise and more people stockpile, food banks face fresh challenges to make sure vulnerable people

have access to supplies, as well as having enough volunteers on hand to keep everything running.

More and more people [rely on food banks](#) and if vulnerable people are self-isolating, they will need food supplies but may not be able to stock up two weeks' worth if they don't have a freezer or the funds to do so. If you're unable to get to food banks to donate, it's worth calling your nearest one to find out if there's a way for donations to be picked up, or another way you can help.

One way to donate without leaving the house is to speak to your food bank about when they are open and ask if you can send them an online delivery via your local supermarket. Or if you know someone in need, perhaps you could buy a meal from a food delivery service to send directly to their house.

In addition to food, people also need hygiene essentials. The organisation Beauty Banks helps stock refuges and food banks with these, but it is now desperate for soap, detergent and more. Due to hygiene precautions, it is only accepting monetary donations at this time – [a crowdfunding campaign](#) has been set up by founders Jo Jones and Sali Hughes to help those in need.

3. Support local charities.

Grassroots organisations are often best placed to help people in a time of increased need such as the coronavirus outbreak – whether with information, food or funds. Evans puts an emphasis on local, smaller groups that are likely to offer “immediate, practical support” for issues relating to coronavirus.

Are there charities that give cash grants to vulnerable people in your area? Do those charities need support from volunteers to come up with an action plan? See if there are any that could benefit from your time, money – or both.

Or check out [Covid Mutual Aid UK](#), an organisation providing support for local communities. “We focus on providing resources and connecting people to their nearest local groups, willing volunteers and those in need,” the website reads.

4. Look out for your community

Caroline Abrahams, charity director at Age UK, says that now is the time to look out for your neighbours “The coronavirus outbreak is obviously a huge worry and looks likely to be challenging for our older population so it is

more important than ever to be vigilant and look out for older friends, neighbours and relatives to make sure they're okay," she told HuffPost UK.

[Letting vulnerable people know of any updated health measures](#) is helpful in itself.

"If you have any concerns about their health or need more information about coronavirus call NHS111 or visit the NHS website," says Abrahams.

Elderly or disabled neighbours might not have the ability to prepare or protect themselves, says Liam Evans at Turn2Us. This could be due to a lack of internet access or shortage of hygiene supplies, while visits from carers might be challenging because one or other person is in self-isolation right now. Older people and their families can call Age UK's free advice line on 0800 169 65 65

to find out how its nationwide network can help them.

“Obviously, we’re urging the government to step in as much as possible – but no one is going to check on your neighbour more likely than you,” says Evans. “It’s more of a social responsibility to keep an eye on your community.”

Members of the public have also come up with creative ways to connect with those who might need a helping hand. [Becky Wass, 32, created a PDF postcard](#) for you to fill out your name, address and phone number, then tick boxes indicating how you can help others – before popping it through the letterbox.

5. Help people top up

Some people might be on a pre-payment energy meter, but unable to leave the house

because they are self isolating. Peter Smith, director of policy and research, at National Energy Action, a fuel poverty charity, says given that cold homes can cause or exacerbate circulatory and respiratory conditions it's "very important that people potentially infected with coronavirus – or any illness – are able to stay warm in their homes".

Check if anyone self-isolating on pre-payment meters is out of credit – you may be able to help them or advise them to speak to their energy supplier. "Suppliers can sometimes provide discretionary credit in emergency situations, although we must stress at this point that we can't confirm what their policies are regarding coronavirus," says Smith.

"If not then they should be able to advise on

other ways that the person can manage their energy use during a period of temporary confinement.”

6. Give blood.

Keeping up with blood donations helps maintain a sufficient blood supply and avoid any potential shortages. As the number of coronavirus cases grows, the number of people eligible to give blood for patients in need could decrease further, which is why the NHS is urging to keep donating.

[The NHS advises](#): “Please keep donating. Blood donation is essential to saving lives. If you have travelled to a coronavirus risk area recently or been in contact with someone who has the virus, you may have to wait some time before giving blood. There are no confirmed cases of any form of coronavirus

being passed on through the donation of substances of human origin such as blood, organs, tissues and stem cells.”

7. And finally

You should be following all the health advice laid out by Public Health England to reduce the spread of coronavirus. This will minimise the potential health impact, and reduce infection, illness and death in those more vulnerable.

You may not have any complications if you are tested positive for coronavirus, but if you pass it on to someone who has underlying health conditions or who is elderly, it could have fatal consequences.

To practise hygiene and reduce the spread, [you should](#):

- Wash your hands with soap and water often

- do this for at least 20 seconds
- Always wash your hands when you get home or into work
- Use hand sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when you cough or sneeze
- Put used tissues in the bin straight away and wash your hands afterwards
- Try to avoid close contact with people who are unwell.

If you are unwell – you have a dry, continuous cough or a fever – the latest government advice is that you should stay home for at least seven days and self-isolate

to try and minimise the spread of the illness.