

Norfolk Flora Group and Coronavirus (COVID-19)

You will all be aware that Coronavirus (COVID-19) has been reported in the UK and in many parts of Europe, including a major outbreak in northern Italy. We give below some advice distributed by companies for which some of us work - but do not rely on this over public announcements and be aware that advice may change as more is learned about Covid-19. We then give some thoughts about prudent conduct when attending our meetings.

The World Health Organization has declared coronavirus a public health emergency of international concern and following this the UK Chief Medical Officers have raised the risk to the public from low to moderate.

The incubation period of COVID-19 is between 2 to 14 days. The following symptoms may develop in the 14 days after exposure to someone who has COVID-19 infection:

- *cough*
- *difficulty in breathing*
- *fever*

Generally, these infections can cause more severe symptoms in people with weakened immune systems, older people, and those with long-term medical conditions.

Spread of COVID-19 is most likely to happen when there is close contact (within 2 metres) with an infected person. It is likely that the risk increases the longer someone has close contact with an infected person. There are 2 main routes by which people can spread COVID-19:

- *infection can be spread via airborne particles to people who are nearby*
- *people may become infected by touching a surface, object or the hand of an infected person that has been contaminated with respiratory secretions and then touching their own mouth, nose, or eyes*

Our current understanding is that the virus doesn't live on surfaces for longer than 72 hours.

The types of activity undertaken by the Flora Group are generally low risk as far as the potential for transmission of infection is concerned, but there is an increased risk where people car-share and where indoor workshops are held; it should also be remembered that many of our members are over the age of 50 and thus fall into higher-risk categories in terms of the severity of the infection, and ultimately mortality.

We would request that for the duration of the outbreak, you adopt the following protocol:

- Please do not attend meetings for at least 14 days following your return from a trip to any outbreak area – currently China, elsewhere in the Far East (Singapore, Macau, Indonesia, S Korea, Thailand, Japan, Laos, Myanmar, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Malaysia), Iran and Northern Italy; even if you feel perfectly well (and watch public news channels for additions to this list over the coming weeks).
- Please do not attend meetings after developing flu-like symptoms: a high temperature, a cough without cold or other respiratory symptoms, or muscle pains, until you are fully recovered (or as advised by medical professional if you were diagnosed with COVID-19).
- Please do not attend meetings for at least 14 days if someone with whom you have been in contact either during the week before they became ill or while they were

displaying symptoms has developed COVID-19 or has the above symptoms, even if you feel perfectly well.

Otherwise, as an additional safeguard:

- Please do not car share if you have active cold-like or flu-like symptoms
- Please do not car share if a close friend or relative has cold-like or flu-like symptoms (other than as above) and you have been in contact with them in the last 7 days.
- Please maintain good hygiene, including regular hand-washing
- It may also be sensible to avoid close, and unnecessary physical contact with your fellow botanists, particularly should the number of cases in the UK exceed 200 or should there be cases in East Anglia

This is an evolving situation and the advice is changing based on emerging information about the number of cases and spread of the infection from person to person. While the risk to the UK population remains low, precautionary measures to limit the potential spread of infection would seem sensible.

This statement will be regularly updated as the latest advice from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), World Health Organisation (WHO) and Public Health England (PHE) and other sources becomes available.

We are not currently planning to cancel any meetings, but we cannot say what the UK Chief Medical Officer's advice will be in a few weeks or months from now. Please therefore check your email the night before attending a meeting in case there has been a last-minute change of plan (look for NFG email which will come via Mailchimp). The above advice and notification of any cancelled meetings will also be posted on our website (www.norfolkflora.org.uk)

More information can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19>