

Croydon Coronavirus Mutual Aid (CCMA)

Information and Guidelines

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1. Broad Principles

Coordinating mutual aid during the pandemic will be a huge undertaking. There are good and bad ways to do it. We are learning as we go along. For now, we're following these principles:

- 1.1 This group is not an emergency service. If you need urgent assistance, please call 999. Nor can it substitute for local government or charitable services. Instead we will try to coordinate with them, especially through Croydon Voluntary Action (CVA). If people cannot secure help through CCMA and its local affiliates, they should call CVA on 020 8253 7076.
- 1.2 CCMA is run by a voluntary Organising Committee of local residents. We have adopted a Preliminary Constitution. Please continue to be patient with us as we get the network up and running.
- 1.3 The CCMA Facebook group will be focused exclusively on organising mutual aid and sharing high-quality information relevant to the crisis. There is already far too much disinformation and divisive commentary around and the admins do not have the time to moderate this. The group therefore excludes:
 - Discussion of the virus that is not scientifically-grounded.
 - Posts/ arguments about the political management of the crisis.
 - Commercial posts not strictly related to public health or getting help during the crisis.

The group also expects all members to behave courteously. We will not tolerate comments that breach the spirit of the Equality Act 2010. Persistent offenders will be excluded from the group after being sign-posted to other sources of help.

- 1.4 For practical and public health reasons, **mutual aid is best provided at a hyper-local scale**, e.g. a small neighbourhood or even just a street. Croydon is huge. It is impossible for us to coordinate requests for/ offers of help across the entire borough. A small group of local residents is much more manageable. Moreover, for public health reasons we do not want people moving around across the borough, potentially spreading COVID-19.

Therefore, **all requests for and offers of help should be posted on local mutual aid groups, organised through WhatsApp** (listed [here](#)), **not on the Facebook page**.

The CCMA Facebook group will focus on:

- (a) Providing an initial “portal” for all Croydon residents wanting to engage in mutual aid, linking them into smaller neighbourhood groups ([Local Mutual Aid Groups, LMAGs](#)) organised on WhatsApp;
- (b) Providing a space for residents to ask questions, get advice, share resources, etc – on the strict proviso that, since we are not medical experts, medical/ public health queries should only ever be responded to with information from/ links to official guidance.
- (c) Supporting the creation and operation of local-scale mutual aid groups, including by:
 - Creating key resources for them (e.g. posters, flyers, standard operating procedures, safeguarding guidelines), so each group doesn’t have to reinvent the wheel.
 - Creating a network of all local group coordinators to share questions/ information and support one another.
 - Managing a centralised database of volunteers, shouldering the burden of legal compliance around data/ privacy so that local groups can focus on responding to neighbours’ request for help.
 - Keeping oversight over the distribution of volunteers and groups and working to ensure widespread coverage, minimising overlap and encouraging groups to remain hyper-local and thus manageable.

- Managing a borough-wide fund-raising and fund-disbursing account to support local groups, and seeking financial support.
- Coordinating with other local voluntary and charitable groups to support one another and avoid duplication of efforts.

- 1.5 Accordingly, CCMA does not “own” or control, nor is it responsible for, the LMAGs in our borough ([listed here](#)). How those groups operate is ultimately up to their members. This document only sets out our suggested approach, which is based on official public health guidance, safeguarding best practice, and expertise in community organisation and decision-making.
- 1.6 Our current understanding of the UK government’s latest “[lockdown](#)” guidance (issued on 23 March 2020) is that individuals may leave their homes to help those in need. That means mutual aid networks can still operate, but they must follow public health guidelines (see below).
- 1.7 The rest of this document has been developed in consultation with Croydon Voluntary Action and Croydon council officers.

2. What Individuals Can Do: First Steps

- 2.1 Read the [NHS public health guidelines](#). Please ensure that you follow these at all times, especially when engaging in mutual aid. Spread this advice to others and ensure they follow it, too. Follow the daily announcements and guidance from the government. Please don’t spread disinformation or panic.
- 2.2 Check to see if a [LMAG WhatsApp group has been established for your area](#). Join it. If not, please start one. Record it in our spreadsheet so there is no duplication. We are working to divide up the borough rationally to prevent overlap between groups and fill in gaps.

We don’t recommend starting your own Facebook group. To run it responsibly (e.g. moderating out disinformation and arguments) will become a full-time job, and your energy is arguably better spent elsewhere. It will also duplicate LMAG WhatsApp groups, leading to communication gaps.

2.3 Read our [Safeguarding Guidelines](#). Each LMAG should adopt these, or their own safeguarding guidelines, and make sure their members are aware of them.

2.4 Register on CCMA's [volunteer database](#).

2.5 If you have just started a new group:

- Send a holding message to your group explaining that it is in the start-up phase. Ask people to volunteer to help publicise and coordinate the group.
- Publicise the LMAG to your neighbours.
 - Don't just add people directly to your group, as this shares their phone number without their permission. Invite them instead.
 - Publicise on social media. Identify existing local groups and share the LMAG's details with them.
 - Use [posters](#) and [flyers](#) – our templates include instructions on how to do this safely; you must follow these. Our best information is that this is still necessary and legitimate during the “lockdown”. CVA, Croydon Council's nominated “hub” for the voluntary response in our borough, states:

Leafleting remains essential. Digital solutions cannot be the only communication channel. Age UK Croydon, drawing on a March 2019 Greater London Assembly report, calculates that approximately 11,000 over-65s in Croydon do not have basic digital skills. Wherever possible, we need alternatives to merely directing to websites – vital information needs to be in paper and also available via phone calls.

CCMA is urgently seeking the Metropolitan Police's commitment to respect this advice. For now, distribute flyers as part of your (entirely legitimate) once-daily exercise routine, and, if you are challenged by a police officer, [tell us](#)!

- If you do cover a particular geographical area, physically or virtually, please log it [using the group map](#) to avoid duplication. Instructions on how to use it are at the top left of the screen.
- Please contact CCMA at croydoncovid19ma@gmail.com, nominating one or (ideally) two people from your group to sit on a central coordinators' forum, where you can share information and get help. Send us your email addresses and we will send you all the necessary instructions.

3. Detailed Guidelines for Individuals and Local Mutual Aid Groups

- 3.1 While helping others you must stay safe and not endanger others. To help LMAGs do this, we have drafted suggested protocols, based on our [Safeguarding Guidelines](#). Since LMAGs are autonomous, you may develop your own versions if you wish, but CCMA reserves the right to de-list any LMAGs where there are repeated safeguarding concerns. Anyone with concerns should report them to croydoncovid19ma@gmail.com.
- 3.2 To begin with, local groups will probably want to **establish ground rules for their discussions on WhatsApp**, to help keep things civil, prevent the circulation of disinformation, and prevent excessive message traffic. We suggest you copy the principles of our Facebook group in 1.3.
- 3.3 Local groups also need to **establish how they will make decisions**. You could discuss on WhatsApp, or [hold a Zoom meeting](#) to agree on this. There are many different [models of decision-making](#), with different advantages/ disadvantages. To begin with, decision-making will be “emergent”, i.e. someone will propose doing something, and if no one forcibly objects, they will do it. That works quickly and well, especially for minor things, but can become problematic for major issues, e.g. decisions about what kind of volunteering the group will accept and coordinate. For that, we recommend that a small coordinating group be selected and make major decisions using majority voting, with everyone expected to vote within 24hrs. The local group should be able to replace its coordinating group through a democratic vote, too.
- 3.4 **LMAGs are best kept small**, for practical and public health reasons. If your group exceeds 200 people, consider splitting it, e.g. streets A, B, C into group 1, streets D, E, F into group 2. If you need help organising this, please contact CCMA.
- 3.5 **LMAGs’ main task will be handling requests for/ dispatches of help**. CCMA will supply each group with a database of volunteers in their areas but managing requests/ dispatch is down to you. Your top priority must be the safety of volunteers and those being helped. On that basis, we have developed the following protocols, based on our [Safeguarding Guidelines](#).

- 3.6 **Establish a protocol for collecting requests for help**, which is accessible to people who may lack technology/ know-how, and safeguards requesters' privacy (see [safeguarding guidelines](#)). Consider:
- Creating a team to handle requests for help, on a rotating basis to share the work.
 - Creating a virtual landline, which will forward calls to a mobile number, which you can change to rotate around the handling group. Cheap services include [Andrews & Arnold](#). CCMA are exploring providing this for all groups using [Twilio](#).
 - Creating a collective email address or Google Form to collect requests for help. A model for the form is here. Ensure you follow data [safeguarding guidelines](#). In particular, never gather data in an open spreadsheet.
- 3.7 **Establish and follow a dispatch protocol**, which follows [safeguarding guidelines](#). A suggested process is:
- (a) The dispatcher posts an anonymised version of the request in the appropriate channel (e.g. a separate WhatsApp group for local volunteers), e.g. "We've had a request to collect shopping from someone in postcode area CR4 2DD. Is anyone available? Please reply and I will send you further details." If there is no response, and especially if the request is urgent, the dispatchers could ask on the main local WhatsApp group, or seek help from CCMA.
 - (b) The dispatcher receives volunteers and checks them against the local subset of the CCMA database to see if their identity and DRB status has been checked, as appropriate to the kind of help needed (non-exhaustive examples below, but see [safeguarding guidelines](#) for full risk assessment). The dispatcher chooses the most appropriate volunteers, ideally assigning two to work together.

Activity	ID verification needed?	DRB needed?
Flyering and postering	No. Involves no contact with vulnerable people.	
Collecting and delivering shopping	Ideally, yes. Volunteer will not go into someone's home, but money likely involved.	No.
Collecting and delivering prescription	Yes, but ideally, we should avoid this: it may involve sensitive personal information and drugs may have high street value, vulnerable to theft. Instead, try to help the person contact the pharmacy to deliver instead. If impossible, collect and deliver in pairs. <u>Never</u> advise on doses, etc.	No.

Anything involving entering someone's home	Yes. Generally, we <u>strongly discourage</u> you from entering other people's homes for safeguarding and public health reasons. If this is unavoidable, this should be done in pairs and safeguarding <u>must</u> be rigorous.
Providing childcare	This should <u>not</u> be done by CCMA volunteers. Childcare raises serious safeguarding risks and requires formal checks that we cannot provide. During the lockdown, all key workers' children have childcare through schools and everyone else should be at home.

- (c) The dispatcher puts the volunteers in touch with the person needing help, e.g. via WhatsApp or telephone.
- (d) The dispatcher logs the assignment in a *private* spreadsheet shared among the dispatchers only (model [here](#)).
- (e) The dispatcher asks the volunteers to provide a likely time by which they would complete the task, and to check in with the dispatcher when they are finished. If they do not, the dispatcher calls them at the time given. If *you* dispatch someone to help, *you* should be responsible for checking on their safety. If you cannot reach someone after three hours, call the police on 101 for advice.
- (f) Once the task is completed and the volunteers are confirmed safe, the dispatcher marks the case closed and deletes all personal and sensitive data held about it, leaving only an anonymised record.

3.8 **Establish exchange protocols** to manage the handover of money and items, and ask volunteers *and* people being helped to follow them. Probably the most common form of help to begin with is likely to be fetching shopping for the housebound. Based on safeguarding guidelines, a good exchange protocol might be:

- After being assigned to help someone, the volunteer(s) communicate directly with them to understand their needs and agree the process, including likely costs and timeframe.
- The person may be able to ask the shop to take payment over the phone. This would be ideal. If not, the responder should pay and retain the receipt. To minimise the risk of fraud, we do not recommend making purchases over £50.
- The responder goes to the person's residence, places the item and receipt at the doorway, calls the person, and withdraws to 2m distance.
- The person being helped puts down the money (or makes an electronic transaction) and takes the item(s).
- The responder collects the money, again ensuring 2m distance is maintained.

- The person being helped should consider washing the items, particularly if they are in a [high-risk group](#).

Note: current scientific evidence suggests that the virus cannot survive on inanimate objects for very long. It is possible for money to convey the virus, if an infected person has just coughed on it (or their hands), and you then touch the spit. But if both parties **practice strict respiratory and hand hygiene** (covering their mouth when they cough, washing their hands, not touching their face, etc) before and after the exchange, it should not be a problem. Remember that using gloves is actually worse than using your hands, because they are harder to disinfect through washing.

If a volunteer is not comfortable with making out-of-pocket purchases, we can arrange for the person being helped to donate to CCMA, then the volunteer can claim this back. See our [expenses policy](#). However, to minimise bureaucracy, it would be preferable to use alternative methods.

4. Safeguarding Guidelines

While we all joined this group to help others, we also need to keep ourselves (and others) safe by following sensible precautions, both medical and personal. These may seem bureaucratic and burdensome but unfortunately there are serious potential risks that we do need to minimise.

Two key principles apply:

- Never assume that someone else has worked out the risk to you and others. Think for yourself. Consider the potential risks and hazards associated with what you are doing. Minimise minimal to moderate risks using sensible precautions, and avoid high-risk activities entirely – these are best left to professionals.
- Every local mutual aid group should ideally conduct its own risk assessment for any activity it considers carrying out. A template for this is [here](#), and guidance is [here](#) as part of a general safeguarding training session, which we encourage everyone to watch.

However, in the interests of time, we've developed the following guidelines that you can adopt for your group.

- 10.1 **You must assume that anyone – including you – could have the virus.** You must avoid contracting the virus or giving it to others. Therefore, always follow the key [NHS guidelines](#). **Social distancing** (keeping 2m away from others) and frequent and thorough **hand-washing** with soap before and after touching foreign objects are absolutely critical. Obviously, if you display any of the [symptoms of COVID-19](#) (or other contagious diseases), you must [self-isolate](#).
- 10.2 [Social distancing must shape how we help others](#). That means:
- (a) Acting locally: if we run around a vast area helping people, we will mix even more than usual, potentially spreading the virus. That's one reason why we encourage hyper-local groups to be the main site of mutual aid.
 - (b) Helping few people, consistently: again, every contact potentially spreads the virus. Therefore, it's better to help just one or two people frequently than to help 10 people once.
 - (c) Avoiding the use of public transport.
- 10.3 **Strict hygiene** is also crucial when helping others. That means:
- (a) Washing your hands thoroughly for 20 seconds with soap and water before and after helping, and not touching yourself/ others while your hands are potentially contaminated.
 - (b) Maintaining 2m distance from others and not entering houses. Follow your group's protocol for exchanging items safely (model in [section 3](#)).
 - (c) If possible, wash any items (or their containers) delivered by helpers, as the virus can survive on hard surfaces for 24 hours. This is especially important if anyone in the household is in a [high-risk group](#).
- 10.4 We must also consider **social safeguarding**, i.e. ensuring that volunteers don't put themselves in harm's way and that recipients of aid are also kept safe and their rights (e.g. to privacy) are maintained. Unfortunately, there are already reports of scammers exploiting the crisis to target vulnerable people. That means:
- (a) Not publicly signalling that you need help in a way that could be exploited by criminals, e.g. by displaying posters.
 - (b) Always telling someone else where you are going to give help and arranging to check in with them afterwards.
 - (c) Never going into the homes of people being helped unless absolutely necessary and then always in a pair.

- (d) Reporting any serious safeguarding concerns to the local safeguarding teams for [children](#) or [adults](#).

10.5 **Handling money** is also a sensitive but unavoidable issue. Those who will most need help will struggle with technology, e.g. online shopping. They may not use electronic payments or even have a bank account. The crisis will also particularly affect the poor and precariously employed. At the same time, sadly, scammers may exploit the crisis to profit. That means:

- (a) Never sending money online in response to any requests, as this is wide open to exploitation. Limit your aid to providing “help in kind” (providing goods or services). If someone has no money to buy essential goods, either try to connect them to a local provider (e.g. [food banks](#)), or speak to a CCMA admin.
- (b) Never charging money for your help, and not expecting to recoup expenses incurred during helping, unless this has been explicitly agreed in advance with either the person being helped or the dispatcher from your local group. If you’re providing a *commercial* service, e.g. paid childminding, this is entirely your own responsibility and not considered part of mutual aid.
- (c) Agreeing how to exchange items for money with people being helped in advance of helping them, following sensible protocols that eliminate physical contact (see guidelines in [section 3](#)).
- (d) When shopping for others, limiting your purchases to an amount you could afford to lose in the event of non-payment, and certainly no more than £50.
- (e) Never engaging in high-risk activities, e.g. taking someone’s bank card to withdraw cash. Cheques are fine – many elderly people still use these. Online transactions are even lower-risk.

10.6 **Financial safeguarding** is also crucial. Sadly, scammers are already exploiting the crisis, but even well-intentioned decision-making can cause problems if it is not consistent and transparent. Therefore, CCMA will operate as follows:

- (a) CCMA will use a social enterprise called the Social Change Agency (SCA) as our “[fiscal host](#)”. SCA will host all of our finances, providing a centralised place for fund-raising and disbursements through the Open Collective platform.
- (b) CCMA’s funds will be managed by three volunteer Treasurers, according to an expenses policy publicly available via Open Collective. The Treasurers must be unrelated, may never dispense money to individuals or organisations to whom they are linked. Individual disbursements will be capped to reduce the risk of fraud. The Organising Committee will supervise the Treasurers’ work and will

have the power to remove any Treasurer who breaches the expenses policy, or any legal or safeguarding principles.

- (c) All incomings and outgoings will also be publicly recorded on Open Collective, where anyone can freely comment and ask questions.
- (d) Local group coordinators will be able to submit expense claims via Open Collective. The Treasurers must approve these, subject to the expenses policy.
- (e) CCMA and SCA will fund-raise to help finance borough-wide and local activities.
- (f) Any funds remaining in CCMA's account at the end of the pandemic will be donated to a suitable local charity.

10.7 **Data and privacy safeguarding** are also crucial. Mutual aid groups will naturally want to gather information on people who need and want help, but this data must be used carefully. The Information Commissioner's Office has essentially [stated](#) that it will not investigate hyper-local groups covering a few streets, but anything larger *is* subject to the General Data Protection Regulation (see fuller discussion [here](#)). This may seem needlessly bureaucratic, but consider these possibilities:

- Volunteers' data is collected using a public Google spreadsheet. Scammers and trolls harvest it to exploit them (sadly, this is already happening).
- A person's address is disclosed in an open WhatsApp group, allowing an abusive ex-partner to track them down.
- A person's medical condition is broadcast on Facebook or WhatsApp, causing stigma or distress.

Avoiding such negative outcomes means following these principles:

- (a) Never collect personal or sensitive data using a public method, e.g. a general call to a Facebook/ WhatsApp group or a Google document. Always use a Google Form instead, where data can be collated and managed appropriately by a small number of people with appropriate training. To relieve this burden from local groups, CCMA will maintain a [central volunteer database](#), managed in a way consistent with data protection law.
- (b) Never collect data without a person's consent. For this reason, don't add people directly to groups (e.g. on WhatsApp) as this will share their phone number without their consent. Instead, invite them by sharing the group link, notifying them that it will involve sharing their number (invitation links are listed [here](#)).

- (c) When gathering data, always state: why you are gathering it; who it will be shared with (see below); and when it will be destroyed (also see below).
- (d) Never share a person's data without their consent. Distribution should also be strictly limited to a "need to know" basis. E.g. a volunteer being dispatched to help someone will expect to allow their details to be revealed to the person concerned, but not to be broadcast to the local WhatsApp group. You should never share details with, e.g. local authorities or even third-party voluntary groups, without explicit consent from the individual concerned. For this reason, as stated on our [volunteer database submission page](#), CCMA will only share volunteers' data with the local group in their area.
- (e) Data should be destroyed when it is no longer needed for the purpose for which it was gathered. For example, a database of volunteers might be maintained until the COVID-19 crisis ends, but some details of individual help requests do not need to be retained once the request has been fulfilled, e.g. what medication was transported.

10.8 **What to do if you have a safeguarding concern:**

- (a) If you coordinate an LMAG and have concerns about an individual in your group, please seek advice from the CCMA organising committee at croydoncovid19ma@gmail.com. It is important to maintain confidentiality as accusations can, of course, be baseless. However, if you reasonably believe the risk to be substantial it is always best to err on the side of caution and remove the person from your group after signposting them to other services that can help, e.g. [Croydon Voluntary Action's helpline](#). CCMA will do the same with its Facebook group.
- (b) If you are worried about any activity by CCMA or its affiliated LMAGs please write to the CCMA Organising Committee at croydoncovid19ma@gmail.com. The Organising Committee will investigate and work to improve practices. If concerns with an LMAG persist, it will be de-listed.
- (c) If you have any serious safeguarding concerns, or are dissatisfied with CCMA's response to a complaint, please contact Croydon's safeguarding teams for [children](#) or [adults](#).