

IMPORTANT Personal message to all SCMA members about coronavirus: PLEASE READ

13 March 2020

Dear Member,

There has been so much happening about coronavirus this week that I wanted to provide all of our members with an end of week round-up in case you have missed any of this. Apologies for any double-posting on my part, but we understand how stressful this situation is for childminders particularly as the majority of you are sole workers and do not have the opportunity to discuss your concerns with immediate colleagues. As such, I believe it really important to connect with you personally on this subject.

RECENT EXTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS

- As you will be aware, things continue to escalate rapidly with coronavirus. On Wednesday the World Health Organisation (WHO) classified the outbreak officially as a pandemic, as 118,000 cases have now been confirmed in 114 countries; and yesterday the Irish Government decided to close schools, colleges and childcare facilities in Ireland for just over two weeks;
- It was widely expected that the UK government would announce yesterday that they were moving to the next stage in its strategy in England potentially involving school closures, no large-scale public events and more people being advised to work from home. However, they have held back from doing so – preferring to delay these more significant measures until the levels of infection are closer to their peak and isolation would have greatest impact and could be sustained for a few weeks. This decision is based on expert medical advice and the experience which other countries have already gained with coronavirus.
- In Scotland, the Scottish Government is working closely with the UK Government and monitoring the situation. Yesterday the Scottish Government announced that, from Monday, public events involving more than 500 people should be cancelled due to the drain on our stretched emergency services. They also have stated that they believe it would not be appropriate to close schools at this time, as the virus could be around for another few months and they do not feel it would be possible to close schools for this extended period. They will keep this under close review.

WHAT SCMA HAS BEEN DOING TO SUPPORT YOU

- When this first looked like an issue we started to post regular updates on our website and to share these with members – primarily linking to official guidance from [Health Protection Scotland](#) on infection control measures. If you have any questions about infection, transmission of the infection, contact with others and/or symptoms this web page and the guidance for educational settings is the single source of expert information about this by which everyone in Scotland is being guided, not just ourselves but the Care Inspectorate and much wider.
- We have received some feedback suggesting that some members have found our updates to be vague. We accept this and share your frustration, but the reality for us all (staff, members, governments, doctors) is that we are experiencing exceptional circumstances which are unprecedented in terms of the speed with which an unknown virus has emerged, spread internationally and is leading to the shutdown in some countries of populations. We would love to provide you, our members, with more certainty, but we can only share what is known.
- SCMA has been operating for 35 years. During this time we have developed our specialised support for childminders and have provided access to competitively-priced insurance. This Public Liability Insurance equals anything on the market of this nature and is aimed to support childminders'

practice. This provides cover primarily against the accident or death of a child in a setting, or damage or injury to a third party. We access this through our sister organisation, the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY) which has over 30,000 members in England and Wales. Through our combined “buying power” we can provide competitive rates for members. To be clear, this insurance does not provide cover for loss of earnings. Nor has this been an area for which there has been evidence of membership demand. However, the emergence of coronavirus has understandably caused some members to question if additional loss of earnings cover is now required. The decision to take out such additional cover is personal and the costs can be expensive. This is why, earlier this week, we shared a link to a [helpful article produced by PACEY](#) which provides some very helpful advice for members on what detail to examine if considering trying to find another insurance policy which may cover some loss of earnings, in order to avoid getting caught out by the small print. As ever, the devil is in the detail and caution is advised.

- Recognising the uncertainty that many members are reporting about whether or not they can charge parents if there are wider isolation measures (such as school or nursery closures) and childminders lose business, we posted practical guidance on the suggested approach to take (applying your normal rules - charging if the child does not attend, not charging if the setting is closed and discussing with parents if things became extended). However, we would stress that wider isolation measures and/or closures have not been implemented yet and, as such, are still just a possibility. If such closures were to happen we would suggest that members adopt a pragmatic approach to reaching agreement with parents, who may also be losing income and with whom you may wish to maintain a constructive longer-term relationship (options could include considering part-payment, deferred payment plans etc.).
- In parallel, we made early contact with the Scottish Government to warn them of the potential impact on childminding businesses (as self-employed small businesses) if isolation measures were implemented and of the need for an economic assistance fund or similar to compensate them, other small business owners and parents for loss of income. The Scottish Government is alive to this issue, has been feeding our and others’ concerns into their emergency planning and discussions have been taking place between the four countries’ governments/assemblies. A package of support measures was announced in the UK Budget on Wednesday (including changes to statutory sick pay and relaxing the claiming of Employment and Support Allowance for self-employed people, so that this can be claimed from day one of ‘sickness’ / isolation). We understand that the Scottish Government are considering the implications of the Budget and if any further action is required in Scotland. We remain in close contact with the Scottish Government regarding this. In a related development, Scottish Enterprise has also now established a coronavirus helpline to provide Scottish businesses with advice on any business aspects or challenges of coronavirus (Tel.: 0300 303 0660, Mon – Fri, 9.00am – 5.00pm).
- Our staff are fielding a large volume of calls from you, our members, largely grouped into questions around –
 - infection control (what should I do if?)
 - potential effect on your income if wider isolations measures are introduced
 - future events and meetings – should they proceed? / should we attend?
- We are currently developing FAQs based upon these. We aim to publish them on our website and put them out over social media shortly.
- We are also in contact with a range of organisations to seek clarity on questions which we cannot answer ourselves yet i.e. –
 - seeking clarity from our insurers on complex enquires

- we have asked the Scottish Government to confirm if childminders delivering ELC will be paid for contracted funded hours, along with nursery staff, if nurseries are closed. I am in ongoing contact with the Scottish Government, spoke to them today, they are aware of this issue and we understand “clarifying guidance” on ELC for providers will be issued shortly.
- At an operational level, we have also been engaging in contingency planning in the event that SCMA staff are required to work from home or are sick, and to ensure that vital activities and services which we provide for members can be maintained.

I hope this provides you with a sense of where we are at and what we are doing on your behalf.

The situation is changing rapidly, in some cases by the hour.

Please be assured that we will continue to update you as things evolve and do the best for you, our members.

Have a good weekend

Graeme

Graeme McAlister
Chief Executive