



School of Journalism,
Media and Culture
Ysgol Newyddiaduraeth,
y Cyfryngau a Diwylliant

Advice for journalists covering Covid-19: Welsh NHS Confederation

The outbreak of COVID-19 is placing an unprecedented strain on health services in Wales and across the world. At the same time, coverage of the outbreak is essential, and there is a great demand from media organisations and their audiences to receive information about the outbreak and its frontline. This can put additional pressures on health care organisations and staff and may in certain cases interfere with their operations in dealing with the outbreak.

According to the National Union of Journalists, media organisations “should recognise this is a global public health emergency, where movement can risk lives, and all media workers, especially freelancers, should carefully consider their own health and the health of others. The latest government guidance places some journalists and other media workers on the list of occupations that are allowed to leave their homes for work at the moment. The NUJ understands that this is intended to apply to those journalists who can only undertake their work by leaving home, and whose work is critical to public understanding of the virus.”

This document has been prepared by Professor Karin Wahl-Jorgensen, Cardiff University, to support the work of the Welsh NHS Confederation. It draws on input from leading academics, journalists and PR practitioners (full list of contributors on p. 9). The document provides a number of suggestions for media organisations designed to facilitate coverage in and around healthcare facilities in Wales. The experts involved in preparing this document are independent from the NHS, and the document does not reflect official NHS policy.

Here is a summary of our advice:

1. Responsible, detailed, and accurate reporting of COVID-19 is an essential public service.
2. Use credible experts as sources and be wary of unverified rumour
3. News organisations should use pooled materials whenever possible.
4. If looking for information verification, check other sources first before contacting NHS.
5. Ensure compliance with procedures for risk assessment and consent.
6. Enforce social distancing and ensure safe use of equipment.
7. Ensure risk assessments have been carried out prior to hospital visits and face-to-face interactions with NHS staff.
8. Obtain consent from anyone interviewed or filmed.
9. When making requests for interviews or information, be specific about who you need to speak to, and where, what and how the information will be used.

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In addition to this advice, we share resources on where journalists can find information about the pandemic (Appendix A) and some existing guidelines on managing coverage of pandemics (Appendix B).

Interviews with NHS frontline staff:

1. Interviews with frontline staff make for powerful stories and can be both visually and emotionally appealing. However, such interviews should not interfere with medical care.
2. Social distancing should be observed between NHS staff and journalists, and between the journalists themselves, at all times.
3. Journalists need to make sure they use equipment that complies with social distancing requirements. For example, they should use a gun mic instead of a direct mic, and they must assume responsibility for disinfecting their equipment.
4. If you intend to visit a hospital, make sure NHS teams are aware of where and when the item they've produced will be broadcast/published.
5. When making requests for interviews or information, be specific about who you need to speak to, and where, what and how the information will be used.
6. Respect the need to protect key frontline staff from the glare of the media.
7. Ensure informed consent has been obtained from frontline staff appearing in the media.
8. Be careful about whether the source you're interviewing is speaking on the basis of their experience or their expertise.

Interviews with experts:

1. Check publication histories of experts (e.g. epidemiologists, public health experts) to verify expertise.
2. Explain any medical jargon or technical language.
3. Provide context for distinguishing between known facts and predictions based on modelling. This is particularly important because scientific models for the outbreak vary greatly.

Social media:

1. Be wary of unverified rumour.
2. The verification of any social media information about the outbreak is the responsibility of journalists, not the NHS.
3. NHS will regularly update information about the outbreak, including through their social media channels, so these should be checked regularly.

Filming inside hospitals:

1. Filming or photographing inside hospitals is strongly discouraged by public health experts because of the risk associated with such activity.
2. There are many alternative approaches to filming inside hospitals.

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- In Italy and Spain, we have observed the following approaches so far:
 - Shots inside hospitals have been limited.
 - Activities associated with the outbreak have been covered through external filming, as far as possible (e.g. people moving caskets; journalists following an ambulance crew)
 - Remote interviews with recovered patients.

If filming inside hospitals is facilitated:

1. Use pooled footage and materials as a default.
2. No live coverage should take place inside hospital premises under any circumstances. Any footage should be pre-recorded.
3. Any such activity requires adherence to strict safety measures, including journalists wearing full protective gear. All equipment must be cleaned in front of NHS staff before entry into hospital. Journalists must provide their own personal protective equipment.
4. Entry to hospitals or health care facilities should only be allowed if supply of safety gear/kit (cover, gloves and face mask) is adequate. The priority at all times is to provide medical staff with these kits.
5. Any such activity requires consultation with, and consent of, health care staff and patients/families.
6. Consider using a [fixed rig approach](#), widely used in filming in hospital settings (e.g. 24 hours in A&E). This facilitates social distancing and minimises the presence of media personnel.
7. Respect any limitations on movement stipulated by NHS teams (e.g. preventing filming/reporting in sensitive areas).
8. No patient should be filmed or photographed unless they are able to grant their consent.
9. Ensure staff are fully informed about what the crew intend to film and why before they agree to participate. No member of staff who does not wish to participate should be persuaded to do so, no matter how much the news organisation or hospital wants to be able to show their work.
10. Ensure that release forms provided by NHS have been signed, confirming that material is strictly for the programme and purposes they have stated.
11. Risk assessments should be conducted by those commissioning or deploying journalists for every site visit..
12. During any broadcasting, signs saying “filming in progress” should be prominently displayed. Sometimes staff may walk into shots unknowingly. They may prefer that their faces are blurred.

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Appendix A: Alternative sources of information: FAQ

I need to factcheck a rumour about Covid-19. Who can I call at the NHS?

Don't call the NHS first. Look to the specialised factcheckers in the UK or internationally because they may already have factchecked it:

<https://fullfact.org/health/coronavirus/>

<https://www.channel4.com/news/factcheck>

<https://factcheck.afp.com/busting-coronavirus-myths>

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/myth-busters>

1. I need the latest UK Covid-19 figures. Who at the NHS has them?

The UK government publishes them every day

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-track-coronavirus-cases>

2. I need world figures...

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control publishes world figures every day

<https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications-data/download-todays-data-geographic-distribution-covid-19-cases-worldwide>

3. That file is 6,000 lines long. I need clearer world figures *now*

Use the Johns Hopkins University map: <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>

4. How does this file work? What does this figure mean?

Check datafiles to see if there are footnotes that answer the question and check the webpage you found them on to see if there are explanations about what the data shows. If you're having technical problems find a data journalist or even an IT specialist.

5. I want to double-check that I've understood these figures correctly

Need to discuss a troublesome figure? Ask for help on the NICAR email list of US data journalists (<https://www.ire.org/resource-center/listservs>) or contact the European Journalism Centre (<https://ejc.net/>)

6. But this is TV. I need pictures.

Check for pooled footage with other broadcasters.

7. What do you mean, I need to be 'risk assessed'?

If you work for a media organisation, your reporting needs to be risk assessed and approved by the person in that organisation who is responsible for risk assessment. This will make sure that your newsgathering is not dangerous for you or for other people. Without that you cannot report on this story at NHS hospitals or clinics.

8. I haven't been risk assessed and I won't be

Stick to the phone or Skype.

9. Who is building analytical models to explain the spread of the disease?

Imperial College London (<https://www.imperial.ac.uk/news/196234/covid19-imperial-researchers-model-likely-impact/>) and Oxford University (<https://www.dropbox.com/s/oxmu2rwsnhi9j9c/Draft-COVID-19-Model%20%2813%29.pdf?dl=0>)

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Appendix B: Guidelines for journalists: Relevant links

Online resources for covering COVID-19

BBC staff guidelines:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/safety/resources/safetynews/whatsnew/Coronavirus>

This site shows the BBC guidelines for their staff, advising on how to be safe as well as how to travel and report safely in light of COVID-19.

Committee to Protect Journalists guidelines:

<https://cpj.org/2020/02/cpj-safety-advisory-covering-the-coronavirus-outbr.php>

This resource provides journalists with health and safety advice when covering the COVID-19 pandemic.

Coronaviruses: Background and sources for your reporting

<https://healthjournalism.org/resources-tips-details.php?id=1102#.XntrhtP7R0v>

This site offers a range of resources for reporting COVID-19, from the Association of Health Care Journalists, who are at the cutting edge of reporting the pandemic.

Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma: Covering Coronavirus - resources for journalists

<https://dartcenter.org/resources/covering-coronavirus-resources-journalists>

The Dart Centre site hosts resources including tips on covering disease, interviewing victims and survivors, and working with colleagues exposed to traumatic events.

Ethical Journalism Network guidelines:

<https://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/media-ethics-safety-and-mental-health-reporting-in-the-time-of-covid-19>

This website gives journalists advice on how to stay safe and makes suggestions for the responsible and ethical reporting of COVID-19.

First Draft News Resources for reporters covering coronavirus:

<https://firstdraftnews.org/long-form-article/coronavirus-resources-for-reporters/>

This site collects and regularly updates information for journalists to support accurate and responsible reporting about COVID-19.

Global Investigative Journalists Network: Tips for Journalists covering COVID 19

<https://gijn.org/2020/03/10/tips-for-journalists-covering-covid-19/>

Tips and resources for covering COVID-19 in a global context.

How to report on the coronavirus pandemic, whatever your beat

<https://www.journalism.co.uk/news/how-to-report-on-the-coronavirus-crisis/s2/a753329/>

This piece provides advice directed at reporters new to covering health.

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Resources to help local newsrooms cover the coronavirus pandemic and adapt to remote work:

<https://www.lenfestinstitute.org/local-journalism/here-are-resources-to-help-local-newsrooms-cover-the-coronavirus-pandemic-and-adapt-to-remote-work/>

A list of online resources to help local reporters covering COVID-19, primarily focused on the US but also relevant for UK journalists.

Short pieces about coverage of COVID-19

Columbia Journalism Review – advice on how to cover a pandemic:

<https://www.cjr.org/analysis/coronavirus-covid19-cover-pandemic-journalism.php>

This post provides advice on how to report a pandemic in a comprehensive and contextualised manner.

Pulse editor on covering coronavirus: 'We are almost on a wartime footing and with similar principles in play'

<https://www.pressgazette.co.uk/pulse-editor-jamie-kaffash-journalist-tips-covering-coronavirus/>

This piece provides helpful tips on covering COVID-19 from the editor of healthcare magazine *Pulse*.

Risks of allowing journalists to film in hospitals:

<https://edition.cnn.com/2020/03/17/media/news-broadcasts-coronavirus/index.html>

This link reports that employees of several news organisations have been infected with COVID-19 and suggests that there are risks involved when covering the pandemic.

The coronavirus pandemic: Reporting on what's working — even in modest ways — helps tell the whole story:

<https://thewholestory.solutionsjournalism.org/the-coronavirus-pandemic-reporting-on-whats-working-even-in-modest-ways-helps-tell-the-whole-c3c5e761453d>

A blog post on how to cover the pandemic using a solutions-focused approach.

Other relevant information

BBC guidelines for working in hospitals:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/safety/resources/aztopics/hospitals.html>

This resource shows the BBC guidelines for production practices when reporting in medical facilities. It lists some of the things that can go wrong and mentions control measures to avoid possible mishaps.

BBC guidance for working with viruses etc (mainly aimed at foreign reporting):

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/safety/resources/aztopics/disease.html>

This website provides guidance for anyone deployed to areas with infectious diseases as well as control measures that should be adopted as a precaution.

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Explanation of how the fixed rig approach in 24 hours in A&E works:

<https://csonline.net/fixed-rig-documentaries-how-they-do-it-by-john-ellis/>

This resource explains the fixed rig approach in television production, which allows the remote live-filming of places that are difficult to access.

Improving the quality of health journalism: When reliability meets engagement

[https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2017-](https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2017-09/Maksimainen%2C%20Improving%20the%20Quality%20of%20Health%20Journalism_0.pdf)

[09/Maksimainen%2C%20Improving%20the%20Quality%20of%20Health%20Journalism_0.pdf](https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2017-09/Maksimainen%2C%20Improving%20the%20Quality%20of%20Health%20Journalism_0.pdf)

Reuters Institute fellowship paper providing useful information and suggestions for how to cover health-related topics.

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Prepared by:

Professor Karin Wahl-Jorgensen (School of Journalism, Media and Culture, Cardiff University, Director of Research Development and Environment)

With input from (in order of contribution):

- Dr Linda Mitchell (School of Journalism, Media and Culture, Cardiff University; former Head of Diversity, BBC; and Media Management Advisor, UNIPSIL, Freetown Sierra Leone)
- Aidan O'Donnell (School of Journalism, Media and Culture, Cardiff University, Director, MSc in Computational and Data Journalism, former journalist for BBC and RFI).
- Gavin Allen, (School of Journalism, Media and Culture, Cardiff University, former Associate Editor of Mirror.co.uk)
- Mike Hill (School of Journalism, Media and Culture, Cardiff University; former health correspondent, editor and Head of Multimedia for Reach plc, the UK's largest regional and national news publisher).
- Professor Richard Sambrook (School of Journalism, Media and Culture, Cardiff University, Deputy Head of School; Director of the Centre for Journalism; former Head of Newsgathering for the BBC, responsible for developing safety policies; past chair of the International News Safety Institute).
- Professor Wouter Poortinga (School of Psychology, Understanding Risk Research Group, Cardiff University; former RCUK Research Fellow in Risk, Health and Science Communication)
- Dr César Jimenez Martinez (School of Journalism, Media and Culture, Cardiff University; formerly of Ogilvy Public Relations; and journalist for newspapers and television stations in Latin America).
- Matt Walsh (School of Journalism, Media and Culture, Cardiff University; former BBC, ITN and *The Times* journalist)
- Dr Susan Kinnear (School of Journalism, Media and Culture, Cardiff University; Director MA International Public Relations and Global Communication Management, former Public Sector Communications Director, Advisor to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister).
- Professor Jenny Kitzinger (School of Journalism, Media and Culture, Cardiff University; Director of Research: Impact and Engagement; Co-Director of the Coma and Disorders of Consciousness Research Centre).
- Professor Charlie Beckett (Director, Polis, London School of Economics, former BBC and ITN journalist).
- Dr Zahera Harb (Department of Journalism, City, University of London; board member trustee of the Ethical Journalism Network, former journalist for Lebanese and international media organisations).
- Dr David Dunkley Gyimah (School of Journalism, Media and Culture, Cardiff University; former freelance journalist for Channel 4 News, ABC News and BBC's Reportage, Newsnight, Radio 4, and BBC World Service).
- Sali Collins (School of Journalism, Media and Culture, Cardiff University; former Head of BBC Radio Wales and Editor at BBC Radio 5 Live).
- Dr Andy Williams (School of Journalism, Media and Culture, Cardiff University; former RCUK Research Fellow in Risk, Health and Science Communication)

Research assistance: Julia Boelle (School of Journalism, Media and Culture, Cardiff University, PhD Candidate).

Copy-editing: Vicky Anning (freelance writer and editor for clients including UNICEF and CAFOD).

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