

How has Covid-19 affected Court Hearings during lockdown and going forwards?

The following is a brief overview of the key measures that are being taken across the UK, both in general and specifically in relation to legal proceedings.

- The work of the courts and tribunals has been consolidated into fewer buildings.
- The Supreme Court building has now closed for the foreseeable future. Meanwhile, cases and judgment hand-downs will be conducted by video link.
- Three new Practice Directions have been introduced. [PD 51Y](#) provides for hearings to be conducted remotely (whether by video or audio); [PD 51Z](#) stays certain possession proceedings for 90 days; and [PD51ZA](#) allows parties to agree time extensions of 56 days in certain circumstances. Where a longer extension is needed, the courts will deal with applications on paper.
- The government's new Coronavirus Act also provides for greater use of video/audio hearings - see [this official summary](#) and its webpage on these hearings, which has recently been [updated](#).
- The position regarding civil and family matters was [clarified](#) by the Lord Chief Justice on 23rd March. Hearings requiring the physical presence of parties and their representatives and others should only take place if a remote hearing is not possible and if suitable arrangements can be made to ensure the safety of all concerned.
- The Lord Chief Justice has also ordered that no new trials should start in the Crown Courts, and no jury trials are currently running there. However, a working group has now been set up to examine how they might restart in a safe manner. Magistrates' Courts continue to deal with urgent work.
- The High Court and Court of Appeal are also only covering urgent work.
- Although the Royal Courts of Justice are open, manned by a skeleton staff of senior administrators, QB Masters are all working remotely from home, without much support. As a result, electronic filings have not been kept up to date.
- In the Business & Property Courts a special protocol should be followed.
- The UK has suspended the service of documents from other contracting states under the Hague Service Convention. It has also stopped responding to foreign requests for evidence under the Hague Evidence Convention.
- In Scotland, the Court of Session was initially hearing only essential business. It is now possible for appeals and procedural business to proceed, although not in person.
- For further information about the affects on Courts in England, see the [Covid-19 page](#) on the official court website.