



BAR COUNCIL NEWS UPDATE – WEDNESDAY 18 MARCH 2020

Courts & COVID-19

BBC Radio 4 Today Programme, [BBC News](#), [Sky News](#), [The Times](#), [Independent \(x2\)](#), [ITV](#), [The Telegraph](#), DailyMail (print x2 and [online](#)), [The Guardian](#) (print and [online](#)), [Financial Times](#), [Evening Standard](#), [Mirror Online](#), [Metro](#), CityAM (print and [online x2](#)), [Law Gazette](#), PA Media, [Bristol Post](#), [Dundee Messenger](#), [Penarth Times](#), [Halstead Gazette](#), [Hillingdon Times](#) + more

National and local media report on the Bar Council's response to the Ministry of Justice's decision to keep courts in England and Wales operating normally.

On the BBC Radio 4 Today Programme this morning, **Amanda Pinto QC**, spoke about the current situation in courts and the impact of COVID-19, particularly on jury trials.

Amanda Pinto QC, Chair of the Bar Council, said: "We are calling for the Ministry of Justice to put an urgent halt to jury trials for the time being. Barristers up and down the country are telling us that jurors are having to drop out of cases because they are self-isolating or, worse, coming to court when they should not, and thereby putting everyone's health at risk. Being in a jury trial should not be a game of Russian Roulette with the participants' health. All those involved in court proceedings, be they barristers, witnesses, defendants, jurors or members of the public (let alone court staff and judges), should not be expected to attend court, whilst the rest of the country is very strongly urged to work from home and to avoid 'non-essential contact' and 'confined spaces'.

"The Bar Council believes that it is vital that the justice system functions as far as possible but putting people's health - and in some cases lives - at risk in our courts when this is avoidable, must stop immediately. We know there are plans to use more video and phone technology for court hearings whilst the coronavirus persists, but we must be realistic; requiring groups of strangers to gather closely together is quite contrary to current government advice. We urge the Ministry of Justice to adapt quickly to this rapidly changing environment, by continuing proceedings where

possible, but without juries and by not requiring judges, barristers and others to attend hearings in person."

Court facilities

The Sun – The Sun reports an exclusive story on the lack of hand washing facilities in court and the impact it could have in relation to the coronavirus.

The Bar Council revealed things are so bad lawyers cannot even wash their hands in court, and accused the Government of failing to provide the basic requirements needed to fight the disease.

Chair Amanda Pinto QC said: "Barristers are telling us that they can't even follow the NHS's hand washing advice sent to courts across the nation because of a lack of soap, broken basins and unusable bathrooms in court buildings.

"The Chancellor's first [budget](#) was an opportunity for this Government to demonstrate its genuine commitment to law and order by restoring confidence in the justice system, so that it can withstand not only a dangerous virus, but operate effectively long-term."

BAR COUNCIL TWEETS <https://twitter.com/thebarcouncil>



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Alison Padfield QC @alisonpadfield · 59m

If you haven't, & can afford to, please pay your BRF - @thebarcouncil is doing a sterling job with very limited resources, & making fantastic use of your money!



Eleena Misra @EleenaMisra · 1h

Tremendous leadership of the whole of the Bar of England and Wales by Amanda Pinto QC our Chair who is being consultative and then decisive and clear. I know she has the ear of our previous Chairs too. Thank you, Amanda and team @thebarcouncil

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Charlotte Mitchell-Dunn @CMitchyD · 35m

Replying to @thebarcouncil

Thankful for the @thebarcouncil approach! I attended Horsham yesterday to conduct a civil trial. I am 8mth pregnant, but the advice was carry on and the trial was in my diary before the high risk escalation. A prosecutor in the mags turned up with coronavirus symptoms..

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