

Dear County Chairman,

Please cascade this down to club chairmen and/or secretaries within your county.

There has been a general warning about coronavirus on our web site for some weeks. I feel the time has come for me to make a more pro-active statement.

Coronavirus is, of course, a real threat. The problem is that no-one knows *how much* of a real threat. We have all read in the papers about washing our hands regularly, using alcohol rub or soap and water, trying not to touch our faces and so forth. We know who the section of the community most likely to suffer worse from the virus, and it rather uncomfortably matches our own demographic. There is no reason to despair, however – we must be sensible, and try to balance how we live with taking extra care.

Firstly, the most obvious thing to do is for clubs to make sure there is plenty of soap available, and that the hot water is on. You must also lay in a supply of paper towels: the hand dryer that hasn't been serviced since it was installed in 2003 and a couple of old towels just won't cut the mustard.

As players, we must be sensitive to others. I played against a woman recently who, purely through force of habit and with no malice aforethought was putting her thumb in her mouth whilst trancing (or "planning the play" as those of us prone to mind-blankness put it, prior to banging down the ace and king of trumps). That's a no-no at the moment. If you see anyone doing anything likely to pass germs from mouth to cards, it's best to gently remind them that it's best not to. But please, don't do it in a manner calculated to wind people up, or cause more panic than is strictly necessary (in my opinion no panic is ever necessary, but perhaps I've led a charmed life).

Conversely, if you are of a blasé disposition, don't mock people who seem to you to be going over the top with their hand lotions, sprays and other unctions – we all deal with things in different ways. Don't forget, if the hand lotion brigade feel foolish or shamed they're going to stop coming and there's no game.

On the subject of other people, if you're aware of a friend or acquaintance at the bridge club who has self-isolated why not give them a call? Contact with people is a big reason for playing bridge – I'm sure a call would be welcome. And you never know, someone might be running low on food or household needs and might appreciate your doing a bit of shopping for them and leaving it on the doorstep.

So there we are:

Be careful

Be tolerant

Be kind.

At our end, we'll provide what support we can. We're investigating the possibility of taking games on-line, and you will be kept informed.

Look after yourselves, look after each other.

Ian