

23 April – Government Emergency Alert Testing

URGENT MESSAGE FOR ALL DIGITAL CHAMPIONS

What's Happening?

In the early evening of Sunday, 23 April 2023 the government is testing its emergency alert system via all mobile phones in the UK. The alert may vary depending on phone settings but typically will consist of a loud, siren-like noise from the phone, phone vibration, and a message on the phone screen. Following the alert testing, mobile phone users will not be able to take control of their device again until they have acknowledged the message by following the instructions on the phone. We don't have all information yet about what this will entail, but from systems abroad we believe that they will need to press somewhere on the screen to confirm that they have seen the message.

Why is this happening?

The government is implementing an emergency alert system similar to systems used abroad. The alert system emits from mobile phone masts and will be used to communicate dangers regarding flooding, fire, terrorism, and other extreme risks to life and property. Alerts will only ever be sent from emergency services and the government and the legitimacy of any message can be checked online at [About Emergency Alerts - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/about-emergency-alerts). From what we understand, the system is completely free, does not work via individual telephone companies, does not need any kind of app download, and does not track individuals.

How will our Service Users be impacted?

Awareness of this event is key to preventing any panic amongst our service users – the alerts are noisy and may feel a bit frightening; they are designed to get our attention in an emergency. For the purpose of the test on 23 April, simply knowing that this is going to happen and to follow any on-screen instructions will be enough for many of our service users.

However, for some services users, this alert system has the potential to cause genuine distress or to put people in danger. For example, some elderly service users with dementia or service users with severe PTSD may be unnecessarily distressed by these alerts, and some of our domestic violence survivor clients may have hidden mobile phones for safety reasons and may not wish for that device to be exposed. There may be other reasons why our clients may not wish to receive this alert.

How can I help?

1. [Talk about this](#)

In Digital Café and home visit settings prior to 23 April, you should talk to our service users (and carers / family members as appropriate) about the Emergency Alert Testing Event and explain what is going to happen, advising them to follow the instructions on the screen to gain control of their phone again after the event. You may wish to show them this YouTube video to help explain what is going to happen: [UK Emergency Alerts - YouTube](#)

2. [Help manage the 'surprise' factor](#)

You may wish to help the service user set a reminder on their phone's calendar of the event so they don't forget it is going to happen. If you do this, ensure that calendar notifications are enabled. Please speak with a member of the Spark iT team if you need assistance setting this up for a service user.

3. Listen to concerns

If when you are speaking with the service user, they express higher than normal anxiety about this alert, or if you are aware they have personal or health circumstances that may mean the alert would cause extreme distress, danger or disorientation, you may wish to speak with them and their carer/family members about the possibility of turning off the alert in advance. ***This option should never be the default response***, and only done when the client personally expresses genuine and elevated distress regarding the emergency alert test. You can offer to turn off the alert for the purpose of the test, but we would strongly recommend that the settings are turned back on again after 23 April so genuine alerts can still be received. However, again listen to the service user, their carer, and their family as to whether this is appropriate.

How do I turn off the alert, should I need to?

- On both Android and Apple devices, go into 'Settings' and then 'Notifications'.
- On an Android, you may need to go into 'Advanced Settings' at the bottom of the 'Notifications' screen. Either way, look for 'Wireless Emergency Alerts' or 'Emergency Alerts' and click on this. There will be a 'allow alerts' slider (or similar language). Slide this to the left, turning it from colour to grey to indicate it is switched off.
- On an Apple device, scroll to the very bottom of the 'Notifications' screen to the section 'Emergency Alerts'. There are two slider buttons – one for extreme alerts and one for severe alerts. Slide these to the left; they should turn from green to grey to indicate they are off.

We would strongly recommend making a note of anyone who has their alert switched off, and we would strongly recommend that you have a conversation with them again after 23 April about switching the alert on again – go back into the settings and the slider goes to the right, back to colour. This way, they won't be frightened by the test, but will receive genuine alerts in the future.

Where can I get additional information or help?

You are always very welcome to call Spark iT, and to encourage your services users to do the same. Our helpline is available during working hours – 01458 550 977. **However, this number will not be monitored on Sunday 23 April.**

On Sunday 23 April our Project Manager's work mobile will be switched on and she is happy to take any calls from our service users in distress or who need help getting control of their phone again. The telephone number is 07908 984 801. This number will be available from midday until 8pm on 23 April.

For hearing impaired service users, please direct them to this BSL signed video: [Nationwide Emergency Alert Test - BSL Video - YouTube](#)

This article from the BBC explains more about the test - [Public emergency alerts to be sent to all UK smartphones - BBC News](#)

The government's own website also has important information - [About Emergency Alerts - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Samantha Briggs, Digital Inclusion Project Manager

7 April 2023