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Guidance
Staying alert and safe – social distancing guidance for young people

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Contents

1. Protecting different groups of people
2. Social distancing and avoiding close contact
3. Handwashing and respiratory hygiene
4. Face coverings
5. Social distancing
6. Looking after all your health and wellbeing
7. Travelling
8. Going to work, education or childcare
9. Advice for young people
10. Getting the care that you need
11. Enforcing the law
12. Communicating with the public

This guidance supersedes England – young people in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should follow the specific rules in those parts of the UK.

Some areas may be expected to a local COVID-19 outbreak. Where local lockdown measures have been imposed, different rules and guidance will apply. The local lockdown pages have more detail on the restrictions and guidance in place in specific areas.

COVID-19 is a new type of coronavirus that causes illness in people, usually by affecting their lungs and breathing. It is highly contagious and spreads very quickly when it is first caught and is passed. The virus can be passed from person to person by coughing or touching your eyes, nose or mouth with hands that have been contaminated by the virus. It is thought that it can also be passed on by droplets in the air. It was named in December 2019. This guidance will refer to this as COVID-19.

All of us, including young people, have helped to reduce the spread of coronavirus in our communities. We have done this by keeping to rules and guidance, and by being vaccinated. As we move to the next stage of combining coronavirus, it is important that we all keep to the guidance and rules that are in place. This will help to keep the number of people who have to be isolated or quarantined up to date with the latest government guidance.

The government has set out a plan to allow people to gradually go back to the way they lived before coronavirus. The plan is to do this as quickly as possible in a way that continues to protect our communities and our NHS. The most important thing we can continue to do is to stay alert, control the virus, and help the NHS.

To stop COVID-19 spreading, everyone should be following the guidance on social distancing.

This guidance for young people is about social distancing and what you can do to stay safe and to help others. It includes information on how to keep yourself and others staying safe and helping prevent the spread of COVID-19.

This guidance has been written for young people in collaboration with young people. Plain English is provided in the age appropriate pages on coronavirus and rules for England and which includes information on:

- meeting friends and family
- returning to school, college or university
- going out and about
- travelling
- the opening of venues including cinemas, campsites, theatres, museums, galleries, sports and leisure facilities, venues, libraries, playgrounds, basketball or tennis courts, outdoor gyms
- the opening of sports facilities and venues including boxing, dojo, karting, cross, indoor gyms, fitness and dance studios, swimming pools and water parks
- the opening of places of worship
- weddings and funerals
- indoor performances for live audiences
- pilots of events in conference and exhibition centres including sports stadia
- the opening of close contact services such as facial treatments and hair or eyelash services

You can find answers to the most frequently asked questions about what you should and should not do during the coronavirus outbreak on our FAQs page.

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1. Protecting different groups of people

This guidance is aimed at the general public aged 18 and above.

Some people have health conditions that mean they may be more likely to become very unwell if they contract coronavirus.

Guidance for young people must clearly be in language and content which is available. From 1 August the government is advising that people who are clinically extremely vulnerable can pause shielding. From this date people who are extremely clinically vulnerable are advised to adopt social distancing rather than full shielding measures.

If you live with someone who is clinically extremely vulnerable then you should be careful to follow the social distancing guidance. Further advice will be provided in the shielding guidance on coronavirus and what you can't do anymore.

Never visit a clinically vulnerable person if you have symptoms of coronavirus or you are being tested or isolating. Follow the guidance on coronavirus and what you can't do anymore.

There is separate, specific guidance on isolation for households with a possible coronavirus infection.

2. Social distancing and avoiding close contact

It is really important that you continue to limit the number of people you meet, even though this may be difficult. The more people you meet, the greater the risk of catching or spreading the virus to others.

To protect you, your family, friends and community, you should practise social distancing. This means maintaining a distance of at least 2 metres (or 2 steps) in any place you meet people who are not members of your household. This is also known as 'maintaining a social bubble' – indoors and outdoors. In some settings more social distancing is not possible; the 2 metres may be reduced to 1 metre if an employer has put in place reasonable mitigations. Employers must take steps to keep their staff safe.

This action will reduce your risk of catching COVID-19 and prevent the virus spreading to others you are with.

Read full advice on how to keep your friends and family safe.

In England, the rules on who you are allowed to see your friends, family and other people that you do not live with are:

- Only meeting in groups of up to two households in any location - public or private, indoors or outdoors. Anyone in your support bubble counts as part of one household. Children under 5 years old do not count towards the number of households in different households if different times. However, unless they are a carer, you should socially distance from anyone in your household or bubble, even inside your own home.
- Only meeting outdoors in a group of up to 6 people that you do not live with. If you choose to do this, you should maintain social distancing by keeping at least 2 metres apart from people you do not live with. You should not share food or exchange any personal things such as cups or drinking equipment or clothes from outside your household.
- Children who live in a care home or 'support bubble' with one other household. This means adults who live alone or with children may form a support bubble with one other bubble can spend time together inside each other's homes without needing to stay 2 metres apart. Overnight stays are not allowed. You should not share food or exchange support bubbles.
- Only staying overnight away from your home with your own household or support bubble. If you do stay overnight away from your home, for example, on holiday, you should maintain social distancing by keeping at least 2 metres away from anyone that is from outside your household – or support bubble.
- Only using a maximum of 6 people in a vehicle, unless all or that you can be contacted as needed by the NHS Test and Trace programme.

If you are under 18 and usually live across 2 families, because your parents or guardians live separately, you are allowed to move between both homes as you would normally do. If you do have symptoms of coronavirus, speak to your parents or guardians about getting a test. Your parents or guardians should not isolate unless they have symptoms themselves.

Though it may be difficult, you should not meet up with a relative or secure partner (boyfriend or girlfriend) who is not part of your household or support bubble, unless you maintain a distance of 2 metres.

It is against the law for anything of more than 30 people to take place in private dwellings, such as a house, garden, or in a public outdoor place, or in a venue. There are certain organisations that have carried out a risk assessment and taken into account government guidance, such as wedding venues, that can host up to 30 people. Places of worship can host up to 30 people. However, although the law only prohibits gatherings of fewer than 30 people in these circumstances we recommend and advise that you do not meet in groups of more than 6 people. Organisers should take all reasonable steps to prevent gatherings with people from more than two households or groups of more than 6 people from different households.

These actions will help to protect you and others you come into contact with and are critical to keeping everyone safe.

3. Handwashing and respiratory hygiene

There are general hygiene principles you can follow to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. These include:

- washing your hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds after you have coughed or sneezed into your hands and after you use the toilet or touch things you also touch frequently outside
- if soap and water is not available, you can use a hand sanitiser, but this should not replace washing your hands
- avoiding touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- avoiding contact with people who have symptoms of coronavirus (they should be isolating if they show symptoms and have been advised to isolate by the NHS and Trace because they have been in contact with a COVID-19 case

By following this guidance, you are helping to protect yourself, your family, the NHS and your community.

4. Face coverings

You must wear a face covering at all times on public transport and when inside a shop or supermarket. Face coverings are not mandatory in other places. But, it is still important people who are not expected to wear face coverings in these settings. For example, if you are a child under the age of 2 or disabled to remove the face covering unexpected or cause to safety concerns. Find out more about the coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance.

Face coverings are not a replacement for social distancing and regular handwashing. You are strongly encouraged to wear a face covering in public places where social distancing is difficult, and you will come into contact with people from outside your household or support bubble.

If you can, you should wear a face covering when you are in crowded and enclosed public spaces where social distancing isn't possible such as places of worship, cinemas, theatres and entertainment venues.

You should be prepared to remove your face covering if asked to do so by police officers and staff, such as borders and airport security, for the purpose of identification.

Evidence suggests that wearing a face covering does not generally protect you from coronavirus (COVID-19) infection. However, it may help to reduce the risk of people with symptoms may transmit pre-clinical infection and reduce the spread of the disease.

If you have symptoms of COVID-19 (cough, and/or high temperature, and/or loss of, or change in, your normal sense of smell or taste), you and everyone in your household should isolate. Your family should also isolate if you live in a household with a change this. You should arrange to have a test to see if you have COVID-19.

Everybody is being asked to wear surgical masks and other coverings that they can be kept available for protecting people who need them for work specific safety e.g. health and social care and other healthcare settings.

Reusable cloth face coverings can be made at home and are more sustainable. This will help to reduce the amount of waste. Cloth face coverings can be made from a variety of each time you have worn. Disposable face coverings should be used once and carefully in a bin where every one.

You should thoroughly wash your hands before putting your mask on and after taking it off.

Access full information on face coverings: when to wear one and how to make your own.

5. Symptoms of coronavirus

The most important symptoms of COVID-19 are a recent onset of any of the following:

- a new continuous cough, meaning coughing a lot for more than an hour or experiencing 3 or more episodes of coughing in a day
- a high temperature
- a loss of or change to your normal sense of smell or taste (anosmia)

For most people COVID-19 will be a mild illness. However, if you have any of the symptoms of COVID-19 you should isolate and get a test to see if you have the coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) and find out if you are a case. Anyone who has symptoms of coronavirus can get a test.

If you or someone in your household or support bubble have coronavirus symptoms, everyone in your household or support bubble should stay home.

If you or someone in your support bubble is contacted as part of the NHS Test and Trace programme, the person that tested should stay at home. If they develop coronavirus symptoms, their everyone in the support bubble should then isolate.

Never take a coronavirus or infectious disease test if you have or have had COVID-19 symptoms, however mild.

Never visit a clinically vulnerable person if you are being tested or isolating. Follow the NHS Test and Trace because you have been in contact with a COVID-19 case.

6. Looking after your wellbeing and friends

Everybody has mental health. Good mental health means being able to think, feel and react in the ways that you need to live your life. Most of us are leading to manage our mental health and wellbeing. Some people may find it difficult to look after their mental wellbeing and to be managed through day to day actions and relationships with friends or family.

There are many things you can do to help look after your mental and physical wellbeing, including:

- trying to eat healthy meals and drink enough water
- spending time outside exercising, playing sports or simply playing. You should keep 2 metres apart from people you do not live with or your support bubble. Find out more about how to keep active and stay healthy and COVID-19 guidance and advice. Free Public Health England or the NHS website. Ideally only you should use your own sports equipment but if you share it, you should clean and disinfect equipment with someone else, and wash your hands after you
- growing and looking after plants indoors or outdoors. If you have space
- keeping in touch with your friends and family. You might want to make sure you feel more social or anxious
- if you live across 2 families, because, for example, your parents live in different homes, you can move between both.

Activities that other young people have found helpful include, but are not limited to:

- keeping in touch with your friends and wider family. This might be in person or on the phone, text, online or via video messaging and calling apps, so you can see their faces and hear their voices. Keep in touch – at home or in a course.
- learning a new skill
- reading, doing quizzes or playing games
- doing art or creative projects
- listening to music, learning a new dance or song
- keeping a diary or journal
- cooking and baking for yourself, family or friends
- doing any school, college or university work you might have
- spending time doing something you enjoy or find relaxing
- talking about how you are feeling to a friend, family member, a teacher, counsellor or using a mental health app. Talking to someone about how you are feeling can improve your mental wellbeing and it can be important to talk to someone from outside your household or support bubble at all times.

If you do not want to do any new activities during this time, that is okay, too. You are not required to do anything you do not want to do. Do what feels right for you and your mood. If you are finding it difficult to do any of the things you usually do, you may want to speak to your teachers or family.

Look at the advice and tips on mental wellbeing for young people if you feel the social distancing, coming out of lockdown or losing a loved one is affecting your mental health negatively.

Blue Banana – a digital hub for young people developed to provide a safe and inspiring place for young people to deal with the issues that they face and to build their personal resilience and confidence.

Young Minds provides advice about mental health for children and young people up to the age of 25. Young Minds provides information and advice for parents and carers and a helpline for those who are concerned about their children.

The City provides a free confidential helpline and online service that aims to find young people the best help, information and support. You can:

- call 0808 808 4994 Mon–Fri 9am–5pm
- access the online community
- email The City

Shout provides free, confidential support, 24/7 to text for anyone at crisis, anytime, anywhere. You can:

- text SHOUT to 85258 in the UK to text with a trained Crisis Volunteer
- text with someone who is trained and will listen to you about anything and collaborative problem-solving

You may also want to read the advisory guidance on mental health and the advice for parents about children's mental health on Mind include useful advice.

7. Travelling

If you do have to travel, you should walk or cycle as much as you can. This will help reduce the risk of infection. It is healthy and is also better for the environment. You can also use scooters, rollerblades, or skateboards, or travel by horseback. To protect the NHS and other emergency services, you should avoid using these activities in a hospital which is likely to cause accidents.

You can now choose to use public transport including buses, trains, trams and the underground. If you do use public transport, you must use a face covering to cover your nose and mouth, unless you are aged under 11 years old. Where possible, you should keep 2 metres away from people from outside your household.

If you are travelling longer distances, you may choose to make your trip in a private vehicle. This should still be kept under your household or support bubble.

8. Going to work, education or childcare

Whatever your family circumstances or your gender, you will be allowed to go to school full time from the beginning of the autumn term.

If you are a student, you should continue to study at home. There may be specific exceptions given to you and your parents, if you think this is important for you, contact your college/university.

If you are a student, your parent may also be working from home, unless you can safely go to work. Your parents/carers have now received. You should continue to study at home your teenage remotely before going back to work.

If your employer is not ready for your child to be ready for your child to return back into their place of work they will need to do a risk assessment and meet the COVID-19 Secure guidance before they can do so. If your child is in a school, college or university, they will be expected to social distance from other people in the school, college or university, and follow the guidance.

If you do feel that suffering to work or volunteering, stay with your employer or the person who helps arrange your volunteering.

You should not go into school or work under any circumstances if you are showing to your house has symptoms of coronavirus (coronavirus) cough, high temperature, loss of taste or smell, or you have been in contact with a coronavirus case.

There are some situations which someone from outside your household or support bubble may come into your house to work. Examples are people who have come to your house to carry out repairs or deliver things to you. Where possible, you should still stay 2 metres apart from anyone coming into your house.

9. Advice for young carers

If you are caring for someone who is vulnerable, there are some simple steps that you can take to protect yourself and your family from risks, including washing your hands/washing and personal hygiene.

You can find out about different sources of support that could be used and access further advice at Young Carers.

Being a young carer can be hard work and it can make it more difficult to look after your own health and wellbeing. Young Carers provide information and advice on how to take care some general advice on things you can do to stay well. In "Looking after your wellbeing" part of the guidance.

You may also want to get some advice from:

Young Minds provides advice about mental health for children and young people up to the age of 25. You can find tips, advice and guidance on where you can get support for your mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The NHS

10. Getting the care that you need

Despite coronavirus changing the way that GPs and other doctors and nurses may work, it is still very important that you get the care that you need.

The normal ways you receive may change or been delayed. Where possible, your health care service should be able to carry on over the phone or online. If this doesn't work for you, your GP practice should let you know what other arrangements are in place.

If you or someone in your household is in hospital, meeting in person or in hospital themself, you should:

- use telephone or online services to contact your GP. Do not just turn up in person to see a doctor
- use the NHS 111 service for issues that aren't an emergency
- phone 999 in an emergency

If you do not have coronavirus symptoms, you may also wish to speak to a pharmacist at your local pharmacy.

If you need immediate care (such in a broken bone) but your life is not in danger, you should head to A&E. If you arrive in A&E, you will be checked for to see if you have coronavirus symptoms. If you know that you have coronavirus symptoms, do not travel by public transport and inform the hospital as soon as you get there to avoid spreading.

Think about what you will need to keep you healthy, including any regular medication and food. Ask your family, friends or neighbours to help you if you need to. Contact your local council to make a plan for how you will get hold of during this time.

Mental health crisis services are available. If you are already in contact with a crisis crisis team, you should continue to receive the support you need. If you are not, you can get in touch 24/7 Children, Young Mental Health Services.

Sexual health services that have not yet opened to visitors are still operating online, over the phone, or through the post. Young people of all ages can access sexual health support. If you need to access tests or contraception, contact your usual sexual health clinic to see what services are available. Some sexual health services, such as condoms and contraception, are also available from your local pharmacy. If you are pregnant, you can still get contraception and you were meant to be having these replaced but are otherwise well, contact your GP or your sexual health clinic to see what is available to you at the moment. If you are pregnant and are concerned about your baby's movements, you can still contact your GP or sexual health services for advice.

For a clear explanation on what services to access, refer to the "Where NHS Services are open" page.

11. Enforcing the law

The law sets out clearly what you must and must not do – every person in the country must follow this law.

The relevant authorities, including the police and local authorities, have been given the powers they need to enforce the law. Police will be able to issue fixed penalty notices (fine) disperging gatherings. When the police are enforcing the rules, a fine of £100 for the first offence, rising to £3,200 for repeat offenders.

It is against the law to gather in groups of more than 30 people in private houses (including private gardens), or heads in public outdoor spaces unless the gathering is for a reasonable excuse. Organisers of gatherings of more than 30 people in private houses and places of recreation may be liable for the cost of the police and local authorities. It is also against the law to be at an indoor venue meeting more than 30 individuals. Police have the power to break up groups larger than 30 in these circumstances.

12. Communicating with the public

The government will continue to update everyone on how coronavirus is spreading in the country and may offer more guidance as the situation changes.

If the spread of coronavirus has grow down to safe levels, more areas of daily life may return to the way they were before.

However, if people do not follow the guidance, the disease may spread again. If this happens, we may have to go back to stricter restrictions.

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Yes No
Is there any problem with this page?