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Guidance

Staying at home and away from others (social distancing)

Updated 1 May 2020

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The single most important action we can all take, in fighting coronavirus, is to stay at home in order to protect the NHS and save lives.

When we reduce our day-to-day contact with other people, we will reduce the spread of the infection. That is why the government has introduced three new measures.

1. Requiring people to stay at home, except for very limited purposes
2. Closing certain businesses and venues
3. Stopping gatherings of more than two people in public

Following these measures will help limit the spread of coronavirus, reduce the impact on the NHS and save lives. Key parts of the measures are underpinned by law

(<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2020/129/contents/made>), which sets out clearly what you must and must not do – every person in the country must comply with this. The relevant authorities, including the police, have been given the powers to enforce the law – including through fines and dispersing gatherings.

The government will keep these measures under close review, and relax them if the evidence shows this is possible. This guidance is for the general public who are fit and well. There is separate, specific guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>).

Some people are particularly vulnerable to poor outcomes following coronavirus infection for medical reasons because of underlying health conditions – this group who are clinically vulnerable – see section 6 – are advised to take particular care to minimise contact with others outside their household.

There is a further group of people who are defined, also on medical grounds, as clinically extremely vulnerable to coronavirus – that is, people with specific serious health conditions. They are advised to adopt shielding measures to keep themselves safe by staying at home and avoiding all contact with others, except for essential medical treatment or support.

Find answers to the most frequently asked questions about what you can and can't do during the coronavirus outbreak on our FAQs page (<http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do>)

1. Staying at home

You should only leave or be away from your home for very limited purposes:

- shopping for basic necessities, for example food (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-consumers-on-coronavirus-covid-19-and-food>) and medicine, which must be as infrequent as possible
- one form of exercise a day, for example a run, walk, or cycle - alone or with members of your household
- any medical need, including to donate blood, avoid injury or illness, escape risk of harm, or to provide care or to help a vulnerable person
- travelling for work purposes, but only where you cannot work from home

Where parents or someone with parental responsibility do not live in the same household, children under 18 can be moved between their parents' homes to continue existing arrangements for access and contact.

The Government has also identified a number of critical workers

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>) whose children can still go to school or their childcare provider. This critical worker definition does not affect whether or not you can travel to work - if you are not a critical worker, you may still travel to work provided you cannot work from home. However, if you, or a member of your household are unwell with symptoms of coronavirus, you should not travel to or attend the workplace.

Critical workers and parents of vulnerable children may leave their home to take children to and from school or their childcare provider.

You can also attend the funeral of a close family member or member of your household (or, of a friend, if no one from their close family or household is attending). Religious ministers or leaders can leave their homes to go to their place of worship.

You may also leave or be outside of your home in order to access other critical public services, such as social services, support provided to victims, services provided by the Department for Work and Pensions, or to fulfil a legal obligation. However, these services should be provided and accessed remotely wherever possible.

House moves should be delayed unless moving is unavoidable.

Further guidance on home moving during the coronavirus outbreak (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/government-advice-on-home-moving-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak#advice-to-the-public>).

These reasons are exceptions and a fuller list is set out in the regulations (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2020/129/contents/made>). Even when doing these activities, you should be minimising time spent away from the home and ensuring that you are two metres apart from anyone outside of your household.

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

Further guidance on the mental health and wellbeing aspects of coronavirus (COVID-19).

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-public-on-mental-health-and-wellbeing/guidance-for-the-public-on-the-mental-health-and-wellbeing-aspects-of-coronavirus-covid-19>)

2. Closing certain businesses and venues

To reduce social contact, the government has required by law that certain businesses and venues (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/further-businesses-and-premises-to-close>) close to the public. These include:

- pubs, cinemas and theatres
- clothing and electronics stores; hair, beauty and nail salons; and outdoor and indoor markets (not selling food)

- libraries, community centres, and youth centres
- indoor and outdoor leisure facilities such as bowling alleys, arcades and soft play facilities
- communal places within parks, such as playgrounds, sports courts and outdoor gyms
- places of worship (except for funerals (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-a-funeral-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-a-funeral-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic>))
- hotels, hostels, bed and breakfasts, campsites, caravan parks, and boarding houses for commercial/leisure use, excluding use by those who live in them permanently and those who are unable to return home

Food retailers and food markets, hardware stores and certain other retailers providing essential goods and services can remain open. Other businesses can remain open and their employees can travel to work, where they cannot work from home.

3. Stopping public gatherings

To make sure people are staying at home and apart from each other, the government has prohibited by law all public gatherings of more than two people, except for very limited purposes:

- where the gathering is of a group of people who live together in the same household – this means that a parent can, for example, take their children to the shops if there is no option to leave them at home
- where the gathering is essential for work purposes - but workers should try to minimise all meetings and other gatherings in the workplace

These reasons are exceptions and a fuller list is set out in the regulations (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2020/129/contents/made>).

The government is also stopping events such as weddings, baptisms and other religious ceremonies. This does not include funerals.

4. Going to work

As set out in the section on staying at home, you are allowed to travel for work purposes, including to provide voluntary or charitable services, where you cannot work from home.

With the exception of the organisations covered above in the section on closing certain businesses and venues, the government has not required any other businesses to close to the public – indeed, it is important for business to carry on.

Employers and employees should discuss their working arrangements, and employers should take every possible step to facilitate their employees working from home, including providing suitable IT and equipment to enable remote working.

Sometimes this will not be possible, as not everyone can work from home. Certain jobs require people to travel to, from and for their work – for instance if they operate machinery, work in construction or manufacturing, or are delivering front line services.

If you cannot work from home then you are allowed to travel for work purposes, but you should not do so if you are showing coronavirus symptoms, or if you or any of your household are self-isolating. This is consistent with advice from the Chief Medical Officer.

Employers who have people in their offices or onsite should ensure that employees are able to follow the Guidance for employers and businesses (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/guidance-for-employers-and-businesses-on-coronavirus-covid-19>) including, where possible, maintaining a two metre distance from others, and washing their hands with soap and water often for at least 20 seconds (or using hand sanitiser gel if soap and water is not available).

Work carried out in people's homes - for example by tradespeople carrying out repairs and maintenance, cleaners, or those providing paid-for childcare in a child's home - can continue, provided that the worker has no coronavirus symptoms. Again, it will be important to ensure that government guidelines (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19>) are followed to ensure everyone's safety. These include practicing excellent hand and respiratory hygiene, and maintaining a two metre distance from household occupants as far as possible.

No work should be carried out in any household which is isolating because one or more family members has symptoms or where an individual has been advised to shield - unless it is to remedy a direct risk to the safety of the household, such as emergency plumbing or repairs, or to provide emergency childcare in a child's home if a young child would be left unattended and where the worker is willing to do so. In such cases, Public Health England can provide advice to those working in other people's houses and households.

No work should be carried out by a tradesperson, cleaner or nanny who has coronavirus symptoms, however mild, or where someone in their household has symptoms.

Further sector specific guidance which sets out different scenarios as examples (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/social-distancing-in-the-workplace-during-coronavirus-covid-19-sector-guidance>) (including tradespeople working in people's homes, construction, outdoor businesses).

As set out in the section on closing certain businesses and venues, the government has published guidance on which organisations are covered by this requirement. Advice for employees of these organisations on employment and financial support is available at gov.uk/coronavirus (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>).

At all times, workers should follow the guidance on self-isolation (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>) if they or anyone in their household shows symptoms.

5. Enforcing the law

Following these measures will reduce our day to day contact with other people. They are a vital part of our efforts to reduce the rate of transmission of coronavirus. Every person in the country should comply with them in order to protect the NHS and save lives.

The police and local authorities have the powers to enforce the requirements set out in law (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/129/contents/made>) if people do not comply with them.

If you breach these regulations, the police may:

- instruct you to go home, leave an area or disperse
- instruct you to take steps to stop your children breaking these rules if they have already done so
- take you home, or arrest you, where they believe it necessary

The police will act with discretion and common sense in applying these measures and we expect the public to act responsibly, staying at home in order to save lives.

However, if the police believe that you have broken the law – or if you refuse to follow their instructions enforcing the law – a police officer may issue you with a fixed penalty notice for £60 (reduced to £30 if paid within 14 days). If you have already received a fixed penalty notice, the amount will increase to £120 and double on each further repeat offence, up to a maximum of £960.

The government will keep this under review and will increase the penalties if necessary to ensure compliance.

Similarly, a business or venue operating in contravention of the law will be committing an offence. Local authorities (for example, Environmental Health and Trading Standards officers) will monitor compliance, with support from the police if appropriate. Businesses and venues that breach the law will be subject to prohibition notices and fixed penalty notices. Businesses that continue to contravene the law will be forced to close down.

For both individuals and companies, if you do not pay, you may also be taken to court, with magistrates able to impose potentially unlimited fines.

The measures set out in this guidance initially lasted for three weeks. The government has extended them as the scientific advice was clear they were still necessary to stop the coronavirus spreading. They will be looked at again every three weeks and relaxed when the evidence shows this is possible.

6. Clinically vulnerable people

If you have any of the following health conditions, you are clinically vulnerable, meaning you are at higher risk of severe illness from coronavirus. You should take particular care to minimise contact with others outside your household.

Clinically vulnerable people are those who are:

1. aged 70 or older (regardless of medical conditions)
2. under 70 with an underlying health condition listed below (that is, anyone instructed to get a flu jab as an adult each year on medical grounds):
 - chronic (long-term) mild to moderate respiratory diseases, such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), emphysema or bronchitis
 - chronic heart disease, such as heart failure
 - chronic kidney disease
 - chronic liver disease, such as hepatitis

- chronic neurological conditions, such as Parkinson's disease, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis (MS), or cerebral palsy
- diabetes
- a weakened immune system as the result of conditions such as HIV and AIDS, or medicines such as steroid tablets
- being seriously overweight (a body mass index (BMI) of 40 or above)
- pregnant women

As above, there is a further category of people with serious underlying health conditions who are clinically extremely vulnerable, meaning they are at very high risk of severe illness from coronavirus. You, your family and carers should be aware of the guidance on shielding

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>) which provides information on how to protect yourself still further should you wish to.