Cabinet Office

Guidance

Staying alert and safe – social distancing guidance for young people

Updated 9 September 2020

Contents

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

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

Some areas may be experiencing 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 local areas.

COVID-19 is a new type of coronavirus that causes illness in people, usually by affecting their lungs but other symptoms, such as a high temperature or recent change in taste or smell can be found. The virus can be spread from person to person by coughing or touching your eyes, nose or mouth with hands that have been contaminated by the virus. The name COVID-19 comes from Coronavirus Disease 2019 – 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 making changes to our lives and following the guidance. As we move to the next stage of controlling coronavirus, it is important that we stay alert and follow the guidance in order to save lives. By "alert" we mean being aware of how to behave safely and keeping up to date with the latest government guidance.

The government has set out our a plan to allow people to gradually go back to the way they were living before coronavirus. The plan is to do this as quickly as possible but 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 by doing this save lives.

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 alert and safe during this time. The focus is on the main public health principles for staying safe and helping prevent the spread of COVID-19.

This guidance has been written for young people in collaboration with young people. More detail is provided in the all-ages guidance on staying alert and safe:

- meeting friends and family
- returning to school, college or university
- going to work
- travelling
- the opening of venues including cinemas, campsites
- the opening of public places such as community centres, libraries, playgrounds, basketball or tennis courts, outdoor gyms,
- the opening of sports facilities and venues including bowling alleys, skating rinks, indoor gyms, fitness and dance studios, swimming pools and water parks
- the opening of places of worship
- wedding receptions
- indoor performances to a live audience
- pilots of events in conference and exhibition centres including sports stadia
- the opening of all close contact services such as facial treatment and make up application

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.

1. Protecting different groups of people

This guidance is aimed at the general public who are fit and well.

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

Guidance for young people most likely to become extremely unwell 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 strict social distancing rather than full shielding measures.

If you live with someone who is clinically extremely vulnerable then you should be especially careful to follow this guidance on staying alert and safe. More detail is provided in the all-ages guidance on staying alert and safe (social distancing).

Never visit a clinically vulnerable person if you have symptoms of coronavirus or you have been advised to isolate by NHS Test and Trace because you have been in contact with a COVID-19 case.

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

2. Social distancing and avoiding close contact

The rules on social contact will change from Monday 14 September: you must not meet in groups of more than 6 when meeting with people outside of your household.

There is further guidance, including on what exemptions are permitted to the limit of 6 people, which provides further information on social distancing and social contact laws.

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 blow your nose, sneeze or cough, before and after you eat or touch food and when you return home from being outside
- if soap and water is not available, you should use a hand sanitiser, but this should not replace proper handwashing
- avoiding touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- avoiding any contact with people who have symptoms of coronavirus (they should be isolating if they show symptoms) or who have been advised to isolate by NHS Test 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. There are some 'reasonable excuses' where for health, age or equality reasons people are not expected to wear face coverings in these settings. For example, if you are a child under the age of 3 or unable to remove the face covering unassisted. This is due to safety reasons. Find out more about the government's face coverings guidance

Face coverings are not a replacement for social distancing and regular handwashing. You are strongly advised to wear a face covering in public spaces 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 also wear a face covering when you are inside crowded indoor 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 border control or airport security, for the purposes of identification.

Evidence suggests that wearing a face covering does not generally protect you. However, covering your nose and mouth if you are infected but have not yet developed symptoms may help protect others 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 and/or support bubble should isolate at home. Wearing a face covering does not change this. You should arrange to have a test to see if you have COVID-19.

Everybody is being asked to avoid using surgical masks and respirators so that they can be kept available for protecting people who need them for work-specific safety e.g. health and social care or industrial settings.

Reusable cloth face coverings can be made at home and more sustainable. The key thing is it should cover the mouth and nose. Cloth face coverings should be washed each time you have used them. Disposable face coverings should be thrown away carefully in a bin after every use.

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 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 in, 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 above you should tell your parent, guardian or carer and self-isolate at home straight away and get tested. Anyone who has symptoms of coronavirus can get a free 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 contacted should stay at home. If that person becomes symptomatic, then everyone in the support bubble should then isolate.

Never take a chance on visiting a clinically vulnerable person if you think you have COVID-19 symptoms, however mild.

Never visit a clinically vulnerable person if you have been advised to isolate by NHS Test and Trace because you have been in contact with a COVID-19 case.

6. Looking after your wellbeing and keeping in contact with family 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 having to manage changes to our mood or feelings at this time. Some of these feelings are part of normal mental wellbeing and can be managed through day to day actions and support from friends or family.

There are lots of things you can do to help look after your mental and physical wellbeing during this time.

It can be hard to be away from your school or college friends and adjust to changes to your normal routine. You might find your routine still feels unfamiliar or frustrating as your everyday life has changed. This is okay.

There are some simple things that you can do to help your physical and mental wellbeing, including:

- trying to eat healthy meals and drink enough water
- spending time outside exercising, playing sport or simply playing. You should keep 2 metres away from anyone from outside your household or support bubble at all times. Look for ideas for exercise and 10 minute workouts from Public Health England or on the NHS website. Ideally only you should use your own sports equipment but if you are sharing a ball or other equipment with someone else, wash your hands before and after use.
- growing and looking after plants indoors or outdoors, if you have space
- limiting your time reading the news or being on social media, as this can make you feel more worried or anxious
- if you live across 2 families because, for example, your parents live in different homes, you can continue to 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
- planning time with friends to watch a film - at home or in a cinema
- learning a new skill
- reading, doing puzzles or playing games
- doing art or creative projects
- listening to music, learning a new dance or song
- tidying or rearranging your room
- cooking and baking for yourself, family or friends
- doing any school, college or university work you might have
- spending time doing volunteering and social action
- being active such as going for a walk, run, bike ride, swim, skateboarding or using a gym. You can do this with friends but you should keep 2 metres away from anyone 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 expected to use this time in any specific way and it is okay not to be as productive as usual. If you are finding it difficult to do any school work you have been set, you can speak to your teachers or family.

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

Rise Above - a digital hub for young people designed to provide a safe and inspiring space where you can learn how to deal with the issues that matter to you and build your resilience and confidence.

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 Mix provides a free confidential helpline and online service that aims to find young people the best help, whatever the problem. You can:

- call 0808 808 4994 for free – lines are open from 11am to 11pm every day
- access the online community
- email The Mix

Shout provides free, confidential support, 24/7 via 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 provide active listening and collaborative problem-solving

You may also want to read the all-ages guidance on mental health or the advice for parents about children's mental health as they include useful detail.

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, 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, take all normal safety precautions during these activities, and avoid any situation which is likely to cause an accident.

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 stay 2 metres away from anyone from your household or support bubble.

If you are travelling longer distances, you may choose to make your trip in a private vehicle. This should be with people from your own household or support bubble.

8. Going to work, education or childcare

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

If you do volunteer or paid work you should be working from home, unless you can only work in your workplace. Some workplaces have now reopened. You should check with your manager remotely before going into work.

If your employer (or volunteering site) has decided that staff should come into their place of work they will need to do a risk assessment and meet the COVID-19 Secure guidelines before you go back in. This includes them taking responsibility for helping everyone to keep to social distancing rules. From 1 August, employers will have more discretion.

If you do not feel safe returning to work or volunteering, raise this with your employer or the person who helps arrange your volunteering.

You should not go into school or work under any circumstances if you or anyone living in your house has symptoms of coronavirus (consistent cough, high temperature, loss of sense of taste or smell). Read the full guidance on self-isolation

There are some situations in which someone from outside your household or support bubble may come into your house to work. Examples are people who have come to clean, provide childcare, or to repair or maintain the house. 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 them and to reduce their risk time, including practising good handwashing and personal hygiene.

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

Being a young carer can be hard work and it can make it more difficult to look after yourself, you may want to think about what activities may help you feel better. You can see 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 health care works, it is still very important that you get the care that you need.

The normal care you receive may have changed or been delayed. Where possible, your health care service should be able to carry on over the phone or online. If this hasn't happened and it is causing you stress or your health is getting worse, contact your GP.

If you or someone in your household begins to feel unwell for any reason or hurts themself, you should:

- use telephone or online services to contact your GP. Do not go in person unless they ask you to
- get advice from NHS 111 online 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 as a broken bone) but your life is not in danger, you should travel to A&E. If you arrive in A&E, you will be checked to see if you have coronavirus symptoms. If you know that you have coronavirus symptoms, do not travel by public transport and tell the hospital as soon as you get there (ring ahead if you can).

Think about what you will need to keep you healthy, including any regular medication you may be taking. If you are taking any medication, you (or your parent or carer) can contact your pharmacy to make a plan for how you will get hold of it during this time.

Mental health crisis services are available. If you are already in contact with a local crisis mental health service, you should contact them online or over the phone. You may want to visit Childline, Shout and Samaritans UK for more information.

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 provider to see if this is available. For emergency contraception (the morning after pill) and condoms you can visit your local pharmacy. If you are using an implant or coil for contraception and you were meant to be having these replaced but are otherwise well, expert advice has shown that for most people they are safe to keep using at the moment. If you are pregnant and are considering a termination of pregnancy, you can still contact your GP or sexual health service to talk through your choices.

For a clear explanation on what services to access, refer to the 'What NHS Services to use' 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 to enforce the law – including through fines (having to pay money) and dispersing gatherings. When the person breaking the rules is under 18 their parents can be fined if they did not try to stop this happening.

12. Communicating with the public

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

If the spread of coronavirus has gone 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.

Is this page useful? Yes No
Is there anything wrong with this page?

Coronavirus (COVID-19)
Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance and support

The UK has left the EU
Check the new rules for January 2021

Services and information
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Disabled people
Driving and transport
Education and learning
Employing people
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Housing and local services
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