

Guidance Staying alert and safe

Updated 22 September 2020

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This is national guidance that applies to England only – there’s different guidance in [Scotland](#), [Wales](#) and [Northern Ireland](#).

If you live in an area that is experiencing a local COVID-19 outbreak and where local restrictions have been imposed, [different guidance](#) and legislation will apply. Please consult the [local restrictions guidance](#) to see if any restrictions are in place in your area.

The most important thing we can continue to do is to stay alert, control the virus, and, in doing so, save lives. This guidance explains the measures that will help you to stay alert and stay as safe as possible as we continue to respond to the challenges of coronavirus.

On 22 September, the government announced additional measures to address the increase in coronavirus cases. These build on the social contact rules that were put in place [on 9 September](#).

The overwhelming majority of the British public have complied with the regulations and guidance on how to keep themselves, and their friends and family, as safe as possible. It is essential that everyone in the country goes about their lives in a manner which reduces the risk of transmission, whether they are at work, leisure, or using public services. When you leave your home, you should follow the guidelines on [meeting with others safely](#).

You should continue to avoid close contact and remain socially distant from anyone you do not live with or who is not in your [support bubble](#) – even inside other people’s homes.

- It is critical that everybody observes the following key behaviours:
- HANDS - Wash your hands regularly and for 20 seconds.
 - FACE - Wear a [face covering](#) in indoor settings where social distancing may be difficult, and where you will come into contact with people you do not normally meet.
 - SPACE - Stay 2 metres apart from people you do not live with where possible, or 1 metre with extra precautions in place (such as wearing face coverings or increasing ventilation indoors).

If you have symptoms, you should stay at home and arrange to have a test to see if you have coronavirus. From 28 September, you could be fined if you do not stay at home and self-isolate following a positive test result for COVID-19 or if you are contacted by NHS Test and Trace and instructed to self-isolate.

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 for the general public who are fit and well. There is separate, specific [guidance on isolation](#) for households with a possible coronavirus infection.

2. Meeting family and friends

You must not meet in groups of more than 6 when meeting with people outside of your household. This is set out in law.

There is further [guidance on meeting with others safely](#), including on what exemptions are permitted to the limit of 6 people, which provides further information on social distancing and social contact laws.

3. Returning to school and university

The government has prioritised ensuring all children can attend school safely, to support their wellbeing and education and help working parents.

You can find out more about the [government’s approach to education](#) and how schools have prepared.

Universities are preparing to welcome students back safely. We have published [guidance advising universities on reopening](#) to ensure they can adequately prepare new safety measures to operate safely and minimise the spread of the virus. Students will be expected to follow the latest guidance on social contact. However, you can meet in groups of more than 6 as part of formal education or training. You should socially distance from anyone you do not live with wherever possible.

4. Businesses and venues

All businesses and venues should follow [COVID-19 Secure guidelines](#) to protect customers, visitors and workers.

From 18 September, it will be mandatory for certain businesses, including the hospitality and tourism and leisure sectors, close contact services, local authority run services and places of worship, to have a system to collect NHS Track and Trace data, and to ask customers to provide these details. Businesses will be required to retain these details for 21 days, and will need to ensure that the gatherings limit of 6 is not exceeded. We know the majority of businesses are responsible and are taking the necessary steps to be COVID-19 Secure – but for those businesses who won’t take those steps, egregious breaches will be enforced with fines of up to £10,000.

In the hospitality sector, pubs, bars and restaurants will be required to refuse entry or service to customers who refuse to provide NHS Test and Trace data.

Customers in hospitality settings must wear face coverings, apart from when they are eating or drinking, from 24th September. [Relevant guidance on face coverings is available](#).

Businesses selling food or drink (including, cafes, bars, pubs and restaurants), social clubs, casinos, bowling alleys, amusement arcades (and other indoor leisure centres or facilities), funfairs, theme parks, and adventure parks and activities, and bingo halls will be required to close between 10pm and 5am from 24th September. Some exemptions apply, including cinemas, theatres and concert halls which have started shows before 10pm, however they will not be permitted to serve food or drink to customers after 10pm. Businesses and venues selling food for consumption off the premises, can continue to do so after 10pm as long as this is through delivery service or drive-thru.

In licensed premises, food and drink must be ordered and served at a table. Customers must eat and drink at a table in any premises selling food and drink to consume indoors, on site. This does not cover where food or drink is purchased to eat or drink off site, when it can be ordered and served at a counter/bar.

From 28 September a wider range of leisure and entertainment venues, services provided in youth and community centres, and close contact services will be required by law to follow COVID-19 Secure requirements. And businesses must remind customers to wear face coverings where these are mandated.

For the time being, certain businesses and venues will be required to stay closed to the public. These include:

- nightclubs
- sexual entertainment venues and hostess bars

5. Visiting public places

You can spend time outdoors, including for exercise, as often as you wish. At all times, you should follow the guidance on group sizes, meeting in groups of no more than 6 unless there is an exception [set out in law](#). You can find out more in the [guidance on meeting safely with others](#).

You should aim to walk or cycle if you can, but where that is not possible you can use public transport or drive. It is difficult to socially distance during car journeys and transmission of coronavirus can occur in this context. So you should avoid travelling with someone from outside your household or your [support bubble](#) unless you can practise social distancing. [Further guidance on car sharing is available](#).

If you need to use public transport, you should follow the safer travel guidance for passengers.

Face coverings must be worn on public transport and in many indoor spaces, including shops, shopping centres, indoor transport hubs, museums, galleries, cinemas and public libraries. From 23 September it will be law for passengers to wear face coverings in taxis and private hire vehicles, and from 24 September, face coverings must also be worn in hospitality venues, like restaurants and bars, other than when you are eating and drinking. Staff in retail and hospitality settings will also be legally required to wear face coverings from 24 September. If necessary, the police and Transport for London (TfL) officers have enforcement powers including issuing fines of £200 (halving to £100 if paid within 14 days). As announced, we will bring forward changes to mean that for repeat offenders these fines would double at each offence up to a maximum value of £6,400. [Relevant guidance on face coverings is available](#).

You should plan ahead to ensure that, where you are, visiting places like National Parks, beaches or other visitor attractions, you have checked that they are open and appropriately prepared for visitors. It is important to avoid large crowds where it may not be possible to socially distance.

When travelling to outdoor spaces, it is important that people respect the rules in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and do not travel to different parts of the UK where their intended activities there would be prohibited by legislation passed by the relevant devolved administration. You should also avoid travelling to any part of the country subject to a [local lockdown](#).

6. Going to work

To help contain the virus, office workers who can work effectively from home should do so over the winter. Where an employer, in consultation with their employee, judges an employee can carry out their normal duties from home they should do so. Public sector employees working in essential services, including education settings, should continue to go into work where necessary. Anyone else who cannot work from home should go to their place of work. The risk of transmission can be substantially reduced if COVID-19 Secure guidelines are followed closely. Extra consideration should be given to those people at higher risk.

Those classed as clinically extremely vulnerable can go to work as long as the workplace is COVID-19 Secure, but should carry on working from home wherever possible.

Workplaces should be set up to meet the [COVID-19 Secure guidelines](#) before operating. These will keep you as safe as possible, while allowing as many people as possible to resume their livelihoods. In particular, workplaces should ensure employees can socially distance from each other, or have implemented robust mitigation measures where distancing is not possible. All workers should continue to wash their hands regularly. Businesses should maintain 2m distancing wherever possible, or 1m with additional mitigations.

At all times, workers should follow [the guidance on self-isolation](#) if they or anyone in their household (or [support bubble](#)), shows coronavirus symptoms. You should not go into work if you are showing symptoms, or if you are self-isolating. This is consistent with advice from the Chief Medical Officer.

There is [specific guidance in relation to 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.

There is no limit to the group size when you are meeting or gathering for work purposes, but workplaces should be set up to meet the COVID-Secure guidelines.

7. Clinically vulnerable people

If you have any of the following health conditions, you may be clinically vulnerable, meaning you could be at higher risk of severe illness from coronavirus. If you are clinically vulnerable you:

- can go outside as much as you like but you should still try to keep your overall social interactions low
- can visit businesses, such as supermarkets, pubs and shops, whilst keeping 2 metres away from others wherever possible or 1 metre plus other precautions
- should continue to wash your hands carefully and more frequently than usual and maintain thorough cleaning of frequently touched areas in your home and/or workspace

- Clinically vulnerable people are those who are:
- aged 70 or older (regardless of medical conditions)
 - under 70 with an underlying health condition listed below (that is, anyone instructed to get a flu jab 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 certain conditions or medicines they are taking (such as steroid tablets)
 - being seriously overweight (a body mass index (BMI) of 40 or above)
 - pregnant women

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. [See guidance for the clinically extremely vulnerable](#).

8. Communicating with the public

The government will continue to keep the public informed of the impacts of coronavirus on the UK, and the law and guidance that is in place to protect the public.

The measures set out will be kept under constant review and we will seek to open additional businesses once we can be assured these will be able to meet [COVID-19 Secure guidelines](#). If people begin to act recklessly, which could impact on the transmission of coronavirus in our communities, further restrictions will have to be implemented again. The government has demonstrated that it will act to impose restrictions in local areas, where transmission rates are rising and it is necessary to protect citizens.

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

Coronavirus (COVID-19) The UK has left the EU

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance and support](#) [Check the new rules for January 2021](#)

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