

Guidance

Staying alert and safe (social distancing)

Published 11 May 2020

Everyone's actions have helped to reduce the transmission of coronavirus in our communities. As the UK moves to the next phase in our fight against coronavirus, the most important thing we can do is to stay alert, control the virus, and in doing so, save lives.

This guidance applies in England – people in [Scotland](#), [Wales](#) and [Northern Ireland](#) should follow the specific rules in those parts of the UK.

The government has set out [its plan](#) to return life to as near normal as we can, for as many people as we can, as quickly and fairly as possible in order to safeguard livelihoods, but in a way that is safe and continues to protect our NHS.

As part of this plan:

- People and employers should stay safe in public spaces and workplaces by following “COVID-19 secure” guidelines. This should enable more people to go back to work, where they cannot work from home, and encourage more vulnerable children and the children of critical workers to go to school or childcare as already permitted
- You should [stay alert when you leave home](#): washing your hands regularly, maintaining social distancing, and ensuring you do not gather in groups of more than two, except with members of your household or for other specific exceptions set out in law
- You must continue to stay home except for a limited set of reasons but - in line with scientific advice - can take part in more outdoor activities

The government has set out a roadmap for lifting further restrictions and opening more businesses and venues, but this plan is dependent on successfully controlling the spread of the virus. If the evidence shows sufficient progress is not being made in controlling the virus, then the lifting of restrictions may have to be delayed. If, after lifting restrictions, the government sees a concerning rise in the infection rate, then it may have to re-impose some restrictions in as targeted a way as possible.

This guidance explains the measures that will help you to stay alert and safe as we continue to respond to the challenges of coronavirus. Key parts of these measures are underpinned by [law](#), which sets out clearly what you must and must not do – every person in the country must continue to comply with this. The relevant authorities, including the police, have the powers to enforce the law – including through fines and dispersing gatherings.

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.

Some people, including those aged 70 and over, those with specific chronic pre-existing conditions and pregnant women, are clinically vulnerable, meaning they are at higher risk of severe illness from coronavirus'. As we begin to ease restrictions, this group who are clinically vulnerable – see section 8 – should continue 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 continue [shielding](#) measures to keep themselves safe by staying at home and avoiding all contact with others, except for essential medical treatment or support.

2. Staying at home

It is still very important that people stay home unless necessary to go out for specific reasons set out in law. These include:

- for work, where you cannot work from home
- going to shops that are permitted to be open – to get things like food and medicine, and to collect goods ordered online or on the phone
- to exercise or spend time outdoors for recreation
- any medical need, to donate blood, avoid injury or illness, escape risk of harm, or to provide care or to help a vulnerable person

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](#) 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 if you cannot work from home. However, if you, or a member of your household are unwell with symptoms of coronavirus, you should isolate and should not travel to or attend the workplace.

Critical workers and parents or guardians 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, but these should remain closed to the public

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, to fulfil a legal obligation, or to move home in line with the government's [guidance](#).

A fuller list of the reasons you can leave home is set out in the [regulations](#).

When you do need to go out, you should follow the guidelines on [staying safe outside your home](#). Most importantly, this includes the key advice that you should stay two metres apart from anyone outside of your household. [Face coverings](#) can help us protect each other and reduce the spread of the disease if you are in an enclosed space where social distancing isn't possible and where you will come into contact with people you do not normally meet. This is most relevant for short periods indoors in crowded areas, for example on public transport or in some shops.

It is still not permitted to leave your house to visit friends and family in their home. The government is looking at how to facilitate greater contact with close family or friends, and will explain how this can be done safely in the coming weeks.

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 \(COVID-19\)](#) has been issued.

3. Businesses and venues

For the time being, certain businesses and venues are required by law to stay closed to the public. These include:

- restaurants and cafes, other than for takeaway
- pubs, cinemas, theatres and nightclubs
- 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, gyms, arcades and soft play facilities
- some communal places within parks, such as playgrounds and outdoor gyms
- places of worship (except for funerals)
- hotels, hostels, bed and breakfasts, campsites, caravan parks, and boarding houses for commercial/leisure use, excluding use by those who live in them permanently, those who are unable to return home and critical workers where they need to for work

Food retailers and food markets, hardware stores, garden centres and certain other retailers can remain open. Other businesses can remain open and their employees can travel to work, where they cannot work from home. The government has also allowed outdoor sports facilities – such as tennis and basketball courts, golf courses and bowling greens – to open, but you should only use these alone, with members of your household, or with one other person from outside your household, while keeping two metres apart at all times.

4. Visiting public places

You can exercise outside as often as you wish and you can also sit and rest outside – exercise or recreation can be alone, with members of your household, or with one other person from outside your household, while keeping two metres apart at all times.

You may drive to outdoor publicly accessible open spaces irrespective of distance, but should follow social distancing guidance whilst you are there. You should plan ahead to ensure that, where you are visiting places like National Parks, you have checked that they are open and appropriately prepared for visitors. You should not go to ticketed outdoor leisure venues, where there is a higher risk of close contact and touching surfaces.

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.

5. Public gatherings

To ensure people are social distancing, the government has prohibited by law all public gatherings of more than two people, except for reasons set out in the regulations. These include:

- 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, although you are advised to do so only 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

It is important that everyone continues to act responsibly in public places, as the large majority have done to date. The infection rate will increase if people begin to break the rules.

6. Going to work

You should [travel to work](#), including to provide voluntary or charitable services, where you cannot work from home and your workplace is open.

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

All workers who cannot work from home should travel to work if their workplace is open. Sectors of the economy that are allowed to be open should be open – such as food production, construction, manufacturing, logistics, distribution and scientific research. As soon as practicable, workplaces should be set up to meet the new COVID-19 secure guidelines. These will keep you as safe as possible, whilst allowing as many people as possible to resume their livelihoods. In particular, workplaces should, where possible, ensure employees can maintain a two-metre distance from others, and wash their hands regularly.

At all times, workers should follow [the guidance on self-isolation](#) if they or anyone in their household shows coronavirus symptoms. You should not go into work if you are showing symptoms, or if you or any of your household 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.

7. Enforcing the law

The police and local authorities have the powers to enforce the requirements set out in [law](#) if people do not comply with them. The police will act with discretion and common sense in applying these measures, but if you breach the law, they may instruct you to go home or leave an area, or arrest you where they believe it necessary. They may also instruct you to take steps to stop your children breaking these legal requirements if they have already done so.

The government has introduced higher fines for those who do not comply, to reflect the increased risk to others of breaking the rules as we begin to ease the restrictions, and people return to work. 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 £100 (reduced to £50 if paid within 14 days). If you have already received a fixed penalty notice, the amount will increase to £200 and double on each further repeat offence, up to a maximum of £3200.

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.

8. 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 are advised to stay at home as much as possible and, if you do go out, take particular care to minimise contact with others outside your household.

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, treatments like chemotherapy, 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 which provides information on how to protect yourself still further should you wish to.

9. 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 formally revisited at the end of May. They will be relaxed if the scientific evidence shows that this is possible. 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.