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Guidance

How to stop the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19)

Updated 1 March 2021

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Since 5 January, the whole of England has been in a period of national lockdown (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdown-stay-at-home>). During the national lockdown you must not leave, or be outside of your home, except where necessary and for a permitted reason.

Protect yourself and others

This guidance is for everyone to help reduce the risk of catching coronavirus (COVID-19) and passing it on to others. By following these steps, you will help to protect yourself, your loved ones and those in your community.

It is possible to have COVID-19 with no symptoms. You can pass COVID-19 on to others if you only have mild symptoms or even no symptoms at all.

The main way of spreading COVID-19 is through close contact with an infected person. When someone with COVID-19 breathes, speaks, coughs or sneezes, they release particles (droplets and aerosols) containing the virus that causes COVID-19. These particles can be breathed in by another person.

Surfaces and belongings can also be contaminated with COVID-19, when people who are infected cough or sneeze near them or if they touch them.

If you have COVID-19, there is a risk that you will spread the virus onto surfaces such as furniture, benches or door handles, even if you do not touch them directly. The next person to touch that surface may then become infected.

Even if you try and avoid other people, you cannot guarantee that you will not come into contact with the virus. That is why you need to follow **all of the steps in this guidance all of the time**, even when you feel well, to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. This is especially important if you live with someone who is clinically extremely vulnerable (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>).

Keep a safe distance (social distancing)

During the national lockdown (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdown-stay-at-home>) you must not leave, or be outside of your home, except where necessary and for a permitted reason.

If you must leave your home:

- stay at least 2 metres away from people you do not live with or who are not in your support bubble
- reduce the time spent in crowded areas where it may be difficult to socially distance (such as shops and supermarkets)
- avoid direct contact and face to face contact with people you do not live with

If you live in the same household as someone who is clinically extremely vulnerable (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>), try to stay 2 metres away from them even when you are at home.

Stay at least 2 metres away from anyone who visits your home for work reasons such as a cleaner or a tradesperson doing essential or urgent work.

Why keeping a safe distance is important

The further you can keep away from other people, the less likely you are to catch COVID-19 and pass it on to others.

COVID-19 spreads through the air by droplets and smaller aerosols that are released from the nose and mouth of an infected person when they breathe, speak, cough or sneeze. The closer you are to a person with COVID-19 (even those without symptoms), the more likely you are to become infected.

Remember the basics of good hygiene

No matter where you are or what you are doing, following the basic rules of good hygiene will help to protect you and others from COVID-19. These are:

- washing your hands
- cleaning your surroundings
- covering your nose and mouth when you cough and sneeze

Wash your hands

Wash your hands with soap and water or use hand sanitiser regularly throughout the day. You should wash your hands after coughing, sneezing and blowing your nose and before you eat or handle food. Wash your hands after coming into contact with surfaces touched by many others, such as handles, handrails and light switches, and shared areas such as kitchens and bathrooms. If you must leave your home, wash your hands as soon as you return.

Where possible, avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. If you do need to touch your face (for example to put on or take off your face covering), wash or sanitise your hands before and after.

Why hand washing is important

Hands touch many surfaces and can become contaminated with viruses. Once contaminated, hands can transfer viruses to your eyes, nose or mouth. From there, viruses can enter your body and infect you.

If you are infected with COVID-19, you can pass the virus from your nose and mouth (when coughing or talking) to your hands and infect the surfaces that you touch.

Washing or sanitising your hands removes viruses and other germs, so you are less likely to become infected if you touch your face. Using soap and water is the most effective way to clean your hands, especially if they are visibly dirty. Hand sanitiser can be used when soap and water is not available.

Clean your surroundings

Clean surfaces often. Pay particular attention to surfaces that are touched frequently, such as handles, light switches, work surfaces and electronic devices.

Use disposable cloths, paper roll or disposable mop heads to clean all hard surfaces, floors, chairs, door handles and sanitary fittings – think ‘one site, one wipe, in one direction’. Any cloths, paper roll or mop heads used can be disposed of with your usual domestic waste.

It is fine to use your normal household detergent when cleaning in your home. Information on cleaning and waste disposal outside of your household (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings>) is available.

Why cleaning your surroundings is important

COVID-19 spreads through small droplets, aerosols and direct contact. Surfaces and belongings can be contaminated with COVID-19 when people with the infection touch them or cough, talk or breathe over them.

Viruses on a surface could infect another person if they touch the surface and then touch their eyes, nose and mouth. Cleaning surfaces will reduce the amount of contamination and so reduce the risk of spread.

The more you clean, the more likely you are to remove viruses from an infected surface before you or another person touches it.

Cover your nose and mouth when you cough and sneeze

Cover your mouth and nose with disposable tissues when you cough or sneeze.

If you do not have a tissue, cough or sneeze into the crook of your elbow, not into your hand.

Dispose of tissues into a rubbish bag and immediately wash your hands.

Why covering your nose and mouth when you cough and sneeze is important

Coughing and sneezing increases the number of droplets and aerosols released by a person, the distance they travel and the time they stay in the air.

A cough or sneeze of an infected person which is not covered will significantly increase the risk of infecting others around them.

By covering your nose and mouth, you will reduce the spread of droplets and aerosols carrying the virus.

You can find more advice on reducing the risks from COVID-19 in your home at GermDefence (<https://www.germdefence.org/>).

Wear a face covering

There are some places where you must wear a face covering (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own#when-to-wear-a-face-covering>) by law.

You should also wear a face covering in indoor places where social distancing may be difficult and where you will come into contact with people you do not normally meet.

Wearing a face covering may not be possible in every situation or for some people who are exempt (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own#exemptions>); please be mindful and respectful of such circumstances.

Why wearing a face covering is important

COVID-19 spreads through the air by droplets and aerosols that are exhaled from the nose and mouth of an infected person when they breathe, speak, cough or sneeze.

The best available scientific evidence is that, when used correctly, wearing a face covering reduces the spread of COVID-19 droplets, helping to protect others. A face covering may even reduce spread in those who are not experiencing symptoms by reducing the amount of the virus being released when they talk and breathe.

Face coverings are mainly intended to protect others from COVID-19 rather than the wearer and are not a replacement for social distancing and regular hand washing.

Let fresh air in (ventilation)

Make sure you let plenty of fresh air into your home by uncovering vents and opening doors and windows, even a small amount for a short period of time. If you have an extractor fan (for example in your bathroom or kitchen), leave it running for longer than usual with the door closed after someone has used the room.

If someone in the household is self-isolating, open a window in their room and keep the door closed to reduce the spread of contaminated air to other parts of the household. Leave windows open fully for a short period after someone working in your home such as a cleaner or tradesperson has left.

If you are concerned about noise, security or the costs of heating, opening windows for shorter periods of time can still help to reduce the risk of the virus spreading. Wearing warm clothes or extra layers can help you to keep warm. You may be able to change the layout of your room so that you do not sit close to cold draughts from open windows or doors.

Why letting fresh air in is important

When a person infected with COVID-19 coughs, talks or breathes, they release droplets and aerosols which can be breathed in by another person. While larger droplets fall quickly to the ground, smaller droplets and aerosols containing the virus that causes COVID-19 can remain suspended in the air for some time indoors, especially if there is no ventilation.

Ventilation is the process of replacing this shared air with fresh air from the outside. The more ventilated an area is, the more fresh air there is to breathe, and the less likely a person is to inhale infectious particles.

Get tested if you have symptoms

How to get a test

The most important symptoms of COVID-19 are:

- a new continuous cough
- a high temperature
- a loss of, or change in, your normal sense of taste or smell (anosmia)

If you have any of these symptoms click get a free NHS test (<https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test>) or call NHS 119 to book a free COVID-19 test. You should arrange a test even if you have been vaccinated against COVID-19 or if you have had COVID-19 before.

Why getting a test is important

It is important to know if you have COVID-19 so that you stay at home, self-isolate and do not infect other people.

Testing positive means that anyone you may have already infected (those who you recently had contact with) can be identified through contact tracing (contacting people you may have been in contact (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-contacts-of-people-with-possible-or-confirmed-coronavirus-covid-19-infection-who-do-not-live-with-the-person>) with) and advised to self-isolate. This is an important action to stop the spread of COVID-19.

We do not know exactly how long immunity following COVID-19 infection or vaccination lasts so it is important that anyone with symptoms arranges a test.

Self-isolate if you have COVID-19 symptoms or a positive COVID-19 test result

Self-isolate immediately if:

- you develop symptoms of COVID-19 - you should self-isolate at home while you arrange and wait for the results of your test
- you test positive for COVID-19

Your isolation period includes the day your symptoms started (or the day your test was taken if you do not have symptoms), and the next 10 full days.

Self-isolation means you must stay at home (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>) at all times and not have contact with other people, except in very limited circumstances, for example to seek medical assistance. You may have to ask others to do your shopping, and you may have to make alternative plans if you are currently supporting a vulnerable person. Do not invite visitors to your home or garden.

There is additional guidance for those who have symptoms or have tested positive for coronavirus and live with someone who is clinically extremely vulnerable or over 70 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/guidance-for-households-with-grandparents-parents-and-children-living-together-where-someone-is-at-increased-risk-or-has-symptoms-of-coronavirus-cov#aged-70>).

Why self-isolating is important

If you are instructed to self-isolate, it is because there is a high risk that you will spread COVID-19 to others, even if you feel well and have no symptoms at all. It is therefore crucial that you follow the guidance and complete the full period of self-isolation.

If you test positive for COVID-19 you must self-isolate immediately and for the next 10 full days because this is the period of time when the virus is most likely to be passed on to others (the infectious period).

Self-isolate if you live with someone or are a contact of someone who has COVID-19

Self-isolate immediately if:

- you live with someone (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>) who has tested positive for COVID-19 or who has symptoms and is waiting for their test result - your isolation period includes the day the first person in your household's symptoms started (or the day their test was taken if they did not have symptoms), and the next 10 full days
- you are a contact (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-contacts-of-people-with-possible-or-confirmed-coronavirus-covid-19-infection-who-do-not-live-with-the-person/guidance-for-contacts-of-people-with-possible-or-confirmed-coronavirus-covid-19-infection-who-do-not-live-with-the-person#what-should-i-do-if-i-am-a-contact-of-someone-who-has-tested-positive-for-covid-19>) of a person who has tested positive for COVID-19 who is not from your household - your isolation period includes the date of your last contact with them and the next 10 full days

Self-isolation (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-contacts-of-people-with-possible-or-confirmed-coronavirus-covid-19-infection-who-do-not-live-with-the-person/guidance-for-contacts-of-people-with-possible-or-confirmed-coronavirus-covid-19-infection-who-do-not-live-with-the-person>) means you must stay at home at all times and not leave, except in very limited circumstances, for example to seek medical assistance. Do not invite visitors to your home or garden.

There is further guidance on self-isolation and support available

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-contacts-of-people-with-possible-or-confirmed-coronavirus-covid-19-infection-who-do-not-live-with-the-person/guidance-for-contacts-of-people-with-possible-or-confirmed-coronavirus-covid-19-infection-who-do-not-live-with-the-person>)

19-infection-who-do-not-live-with-the-person) to those self-isolating.

Why self-isolating if you live with someone or are a contact of someone who has coronavirus is important

If you are a contact (you have recently been in contact with someone who has tested positive or has symptoms of COVID-19), you must self-isolate for 10 full days following your contact with that person.

You must self-isolate for 10 days because this is how long it can take to develop the infection after being exposed (the incubation period).

If you are instructed to self-isolate, it is because there is a high risk that you will develop COVID-19 and might spread it to others, even if you feel well and have no symptoms at all. It is therefore crucial you follow the guidance and complete the full period of self-isolation.

Vaccination

The NHS is currently offering COVID-19 vaccines (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/coronavirus-vaccine/?priority-taxon=774cee22-d896-44c1-a611-e3109cce8eae>) to people at the highest risk of becoming unwell from COVID-19.

The vaccines have been shown to reduce the likelihood of severe illness, but we do not know yet if they stop COVID-19 from spreading.

Even if you have been vaccinated, you could still spread COVID-19 to others.

To help protect your friends, family, and community you should continue to follow all of the advice above even if you have been vaccinated.

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