



1. Home (<https://www.gov.uk/>)
 2. Government (<https://www.gov.uk/government/all>)
 3. Staying alert and safe (social distancing) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing>)
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1. Cabinet Office (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/cabinet-office>)

Guidance

Staying alert and safe (social distancing)

Updated 4 June 2020

Contents

1. Protecting different groups of people
2. Activity outside the home
3. Returning to school
4. Going to the shops
5. Other businesses and venues
6. Visiting public places
7. Going to work
8. Enforcing the law
9. Clinically vulnerable people
10. Communicating with the public



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This publication is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing>

Everyone's actions have helped to reduce the transmission of coronavirus in our communities. **Fatalities and infection rates continue to fall.**

The government has set out its plan (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/our-plan-to-rebuild-the-uk-governments-covid-19-recovery-strategy>) 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. **The most important thing we can continue to do is to stay alert, control the virus, and, in doing so, save lives.**

This guidance applies in England – people in Scotland (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-individuals-and-businesses-in-scotland>), Wales (<https://gov.wales/coronavirus>) and Northern Ireland (<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/coronavirus-covid-19>) should follow the specific rules in those parts of the UK.

At the moment:

- You can spend time outdoors, including private gardens and other outdoor spaces, in groups of up to six people from different households, following social distancing guidelines
- You should go to work if you cannot work from home and your business has not been required to close by law
- Some shops are beginning to reopen, with a plan for more to do so later in the month
- Children in early years (age 0-5), reception, year 1 and year 6 can return to childcare or school in line with the arrangements made by their school
- You can be tested as part of the test and trace programme (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-test-and-trace-how-it-works#the-nhs-coronavirus-app>), which will enable us to return to normal life as soon as possible, by helping to control transmission risks

This plan is dependent on us continuing to successfully control the spread of the virus. If the evidence does not show sufficient progress is being made in controlling the virus to justify the easements, then the proposed lifting of restrictions may have to be delayed until such a time as it is safe to do so. 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.

That is why you should stay alert (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-safe-outside-your-home>) and follow social distancing guidelines. You must not:

- gather outdoors in groups of more than six people with people you do not live with
- visit friends or family inside their home or any other indoor place
- stay away from your own home overnight, except for in a limited set of circumstances, such as for work purposes

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 (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2020/350>), 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 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do>).

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 9](#) – 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 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>) to keep themselves safe by staying at home and avoiding gatherings or, if individuals wish to spend time outdoors, to take extra care to minimise contact with others by keeping two metres apart at all times.

2. Activity outside the home

You should continue to stay alert and limit your contact with others. Staying at home is the easiest way to do this.

However, in line with scientific advice that the risk of transmitting the virus is much lower outside, the Government is permitting more social activity outside. You can spend time outdoors with members of your own household and you can also meet in a gathering of up to six people you do not live with, provided you maintain social distancing and stay 2 metres apart. This can be in a public outdoor space, or in a private garden or uncovered yard or terrace.

The more people you have interactions with, the more chances we give the virus to spread. When seeing friends and family outdoors:

- It would be sensible to keep the total number of people you see limited - especially over short periods of time
- You should access private gardens without entering someone's home, wherever possible
- You should not go indoors unless you need the toilet urgently, or are passing through to access the garden or go home
- Avoid touching surfaces and if you use the toilet wash your hands thoroughly, wipe down surfaces, use separate or paper towels and wash or dispose of them safely after use
- You cannot use garages, sheds or cabins with non-household members – these are all indoor areas where the risk of transmission is higher
- You should not share garden or sports equipment with people outside of your household
- You can have a barbeque or a picnic, but should, where possible, try to avoid sharing food and drink. You should not pass each other food or drink unless you live together. You should not use plates or utensils that someone from another house has touched - either bring your own or ensure you have thoroughly cleaned them before using. Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly for at least 20 seconds and use disposable towels if possible.

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. It will remain prohibited in law for people to (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2020/350>):

- visit friends and family inside their homes or spend time indoors with anyone you do not live with - subject to limited exceptions, for example, for work, providing emergency assistance or caring for the vulnerable

- spend time outdoors, including for exercise, in groups greater than six people - subject to limited exceptions. You should continue to practise social distancing with anyone from outside your household, including while playing sport
- stay overnight away from home - subject to limited exceptions, including for work, funerals or avoiding harm
- incite others to commit one of the above offences, for example by inviting people to a party
- threaten others with infection by coronavirus, for example by coughing or spitting in their direction

It is an offence to breach these restrictions and the police and local authorities have the powers to enforce the requirements.

When you leave your home, you should follow the guidelines on staying safe outside your home (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/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 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-wear-and-make-a-cloth-face-covering>) can help us protect each other and reduce the spread of the disease if you are in an enclosed space where social distancing is difficult and where you will come into contact with people you do not normally meet. If you are showing coronavirus symptoms, or if you or any of your household are self-isolating (including if you have been contacted by the test and trace programme (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-test-and-trace-how-it-works#the-nhs-coronavirus-app>)), you should 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>) - this is critical to staying safe and saving lives.

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>) has been issued.

3. Returning to school

The Government has announced the intention to implement a phased return for early years settings and schools, and has provided guidance on the return of children to schools and childcare. Schools are now open for early years (aged 0-5), Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 groups, subject to local arrangements. From 15 June, secondary schools and further education colleges will also begin some face to face support with Year 10 and 12 pupils.

You can find out more (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus/education-and-childcare>) about the Government's approach to education and how schools are preparing.

School places of all age groups remain available to the children 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>).

4. Going to the shops

The Government set out in its plan (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/our-plan-to-rebuild-the-uk-governments-covid-19-recovery-strategy>) that further retail would be permitted to open in June. Outdoor markets and car showrooms can now be open - the risk of transmission of the virus is lower in these outdoor and more open spaces. The Government has set out its intention for all other non-essential retail stores to be able to reopen from 15 June, but only provided the five tests are still being met and shops have been made COVID-19 Secure.

All shops and other retailers should meet the COVID-19 Secure guidelines (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>) to protect shoppers and workers.

You must only visit shops with people you live with and you should practise social distancing from other people at all times.

5. Other businesses and venues

For the time being, certain other businesses and venues will still be required by law (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2020/350>) to stay closed to the public, subject to the limited exceptions. These include:

- restaurants and cafes, other than for takeaway
- pubs, cinemas, theatres and nightclubs
- clothing and electronics stores
- hair, beauty and nail salons
- libraries, community centres, and youth centres
- indoor and outdoor leisure facilities such as bowling alleys, gyms, arcades and soft play facilities
- outdoor attractions such as funfairs, theme parks and zoos
- 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, critical workers where their need is for a work purpose, elite athletes and those needing to self-isolate after arriving in the UK

Other businesses can remain open and their employees can travel to work, where they cannot work from home.

6. Visiting public places

You can spend time outdoors, including exercise, as often as you wish. This must be with people you live with, or in a gathering of up to six including people from outside your household, and you should keep two metres apart at all times.

You should continue to avoid public transport other than for essential journeys so should make journeys by cycling, walking or driving in a private vehicle where possible.

You may travel to outdoor publicly accessible open spaces irrespective of distance with people in your household, but should follow social distancing guidance while 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. Many other outdoor venues where there is a higher risk of close contact and touching surfaces will remain closed as set out in the law. Campsites will remain closed and you are not allowed to stay away overnight, so should allow enough time to return home.

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.

7. Going to work

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 (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-travel-guidance-for-passengers>) 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 (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>). These will keep you as safe as possible, while 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 (<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 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 (<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5eb967e286650c2791ec7100/working-safely-during-covid-19-other-peoples-homes-240520.pdf>) – for example by tradespeople carrying out repairs and maintenance, cleaners, or those providing paid-for childcare in a child's home.

8. Enforcing the law

The police and local authorities have the powers to enforce the requirements set out in law (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2020/350>) 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 regulations, they may instruct you to disperse, leave an area, issue you with a fixed penalty notice or arrest you where they believe it necessary. They may also instruct you to take steps to stop your children breaking these legal requirements again if they have already done so.

The government has introduced higher penalties for those who do not comply, to reflect the increased risk to others of breaking the rules as we begin to ease the restrictions. 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.

9. 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 or medicines they are taking (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. [Updated advice is available here](#)

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>).

10. 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 [June](#). 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.