

# COVID-19: staying alert and safe (social distancing) guidance for young people

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

COVID-19 is a new type of coronavirus that causes illness in people by affecting their lungs and therefore their breathing. 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 coronavirus (COVID-19).

All of us, including young people, have helped to reduce the spread of coronavirus. 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 developed a plan to allow people to gradually go back to the way they were living before coronavirus. This will not be happening immediately, and may happen in different stages for different people. Our goal is to “stay alert, control the virus, save lives”

To stop coronavirus (COVID-19) spreading, everyone should be staying at home as much as possible. Some young people, who are clinically extremely vulnerable, should stay at home all the time. This is called ‘shielding’. Guidance on ‘shielding’ for these clinically extremely vulnerable young people is [available here](#).

This guidance is about social distancing and what you can do to stay alert and safe during this time, and explains the new measures that will help you to stay safe as rules on being outside, or at school or work, change.

## 1. Protecting different groups of people

We will refer to three groups of people.

- Most people, or “the general public”
- People who are clinically vulnerable
- People who are clinically extremely vulnerable

The majority of this guidance is aimed at most people, who are not clinically vulnerable.

If people are **clinically vulnerable** this means they have health conditions that mean they may be more likely to get very unwell if they catch coronavirus.

People are described as clinically vulnerable if they are:

1. aged 70 or older
2. under 70 with an underlying health condition listed below (that is, anyone instructed to get a flu jab as an adult 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 due to conditions such as HIV and AIDS, or medicines such as steroid tablets
  - seriously overweight (a body mass index (BMI) of 40 or above)
  - pregnant women

If you are clinically vulnerable, you can return to school (when it is open for you) if you and your teacher have discussed your return and agreed it is right for you .

If your employer is allowed to open again and has contacted you about returning to work, you can travel to work but only if it is not reasonably possible for your job to be done at home, If you can, you should avoid public transport (e.g. walk or cycle to work). If you do not feel safe returning to work, you should have this conversation with your employer

Some people have other health conditions, which mean that the risks of becoming infected or being very unwell and having to go to hospital are even greater - this is called being **clinically extremely vulnerable**.

The list of children, young people and adults that have been strongly advised to shield because they are clinically extremely vulnerable includes people who:

- have had a solid organ transplant – kidney, liver, pancreas, heart or lung
- are having treatments for some cancers
- have severe long-term lung disease, including cystic fibrosis and severe asthma
- have rare diseases that increase their risk of infection (such as homozygous sickle cell)
- are pregnant with significant heart disease

If you are **clinically extremely vulnerable** you are strongly advised to be “shielding”. This means staying at home at all times and not going out except for

medical treatment. You, your household and carers should read and understand [the guidance on shielding](#).

If you are [clinically extremely vulnerable](#) you should have received a letter from the NHS, and there is specific support available for you. If you think you are extremely clinically vulnerable but have not received a letter, you should contact your GP or hospital doctor.

If you are not vulnerable, but live with someone who is **clinically extremely vulnerable** and is shielding, then you should be especially careful to follow the guidance on staying alert and safe using the advice in this version for young people or the [full version](#).

## 2. Staying at home

### When you can go outside

There are only certain reasons why you should be leaving your house. If you leave your house for these reasons, you must stay 2 metres away from other people who you don't live with. 2 metres is three steps, or three big steps if you are a smaller person.

Reasons why you can leave your home include:

- shopping for food and medicine. You should try to limit the number of times you go shopping in a week.
- Exercising. For example, a run, walk or cycle alone or with members of your household or with one other person from another household
- Playing counts as exercise. If you are playing with equipment, you may want to clean this with soap or disinfectant when you return home. Playgrounds are still closed but some outdoor sports spaces are open such as tennis and basketball courts.
- Exercising pets including dogs and horses
- Any medical need, including to donate blood
- To avoid or escape being hurt (for example leaving a violent or dangerous home). If you are not feeling safe at home it is always okay to leave the house. If you or a member of your household is in danger, or you are feeling scared, you can ring 999, or contact [Childline](#).
- To provide care or to help a vulnerable person
- If your parent or guardian is a [critical worker](#) or if you have a social worker or an education health care (EHC) plan, you are still allowed to go to school or childcare. A list of [critical workers](#) is available

- If you are under 18 and usually live across 2 families, because your parents or guardians live separately, you are allowed to move between both homes as you would normally do. If you do have symptoms of coronavirus, speak to your parents or guardians about staying in one home until you recover but [both families should follow the isolation guidance for 14 days](#).
- Travelling to work which cannot reasonably be done at home. If you can, you should avoid public transport (e.g. walk or cycle to work). If you do not feel safe returning to work, you should have this conversation with your employer.
- You can attend the funeral of a family member or a member of your household. You can also attend a friend's funeral if none of their family will be there. Many families are choosing to have funeral services over video links, you may be able to see if this is appropriate for your friend or family member.
- If you are receiving support from the government, such as social services, as a victim of crime, or receiving benefits, you can attend appointments for these issues.

These reasons are the main exceptions. You can read a fuller list in the [law, which underpins these measures](#). The law sets out clearly what you must and must not do – every person in the country must comply with this. The relevant authorities, including the police, have been given the powers to enforce the law – including through fines 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.

Even when leaving the house for these allowed reasons, you should practise social distancing, which means maintaining a distance of at least 2 metres (or 3 steps or 3 big steps for younger children) between yourself and anyone who is not from your household. Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds using soap and water when you return home.

Face coverings are not a replacement for social distancing and regular handwashing. If you are in an enclosed public space where social distancing isn't possible, such as a shop or on public transport you should consider wearing a face covering. Covering your nose and mouth can help people protect others and reduce the spread of the disease. Face coverings do not need to be worn outdoors, while exercising or in schools, or by people who find them difficult to use such as children that are primary age or younger. 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. Reusable cloth [face coverings can be made at home](#). Cloth face coverings should be washed each time you have used them. Disposable face coverings should be thrown away carefully after every use. You should thoroughly wash your hands after taking your mask off. You should not take your mask off simply to speak to someone.

### **Symptoms of Coronavirus**

The most important symptoms of coronavirus (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 coronavirus (COVID-19) will be a mild illness. However, if you have **any** of the symptoms above you should [self-isolate at home](#) straight away.

## Handwashing and personal hygiene

There are general principles you can follow to help prevent the spread of COVID-19, including:

- 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)

By following this guidance, you are helping to protect yourself, your family, the NHS and your community.

## Looking after your wellbeing and keeping in contact with family and friends when staying at home

There are lots of things you can do to help look after your mental and physical wellbeing. You may find social distancing frustrating or stressful. It can be hard to be away from your friends, change your normal routine and become less active.

Try to keep in touch with your friends and wider family. This might be on the phone, text, online or via video messaging and calling apps, so you can see their faces during this time. However, don't feel pressured to always use them, a text is okay, too, and do whatever you feel comfortable with.

Think about the things you would like to do while you stay at home. This might include, but is not limited to:

- spending quality time with people you live with
- watching films and television

- learning a new skill
- reading
- doing art or creative projects
- listening to music
- learning a new dance or song
- doing puzzles
- playing games
- tidying or rearranging your room
- cooking and baking
- doing any school, college or university work you might have
- spending time doing volunteering and social action activities that you can do from home
- exercising in your home or garden (look for ideas for exercise and 10 minute workouts from Public Health England or on the NHS website)

If you do not want to do any activities during this time, that is okay, too. You are not expected to use this time in any specific way and it is okay to not 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 teacher.

You might find your routine feels unfamiliar 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 with the windows open to let in the fresh air, arranging space to sit and see a nice view (if possible) and get some natural sunlight
- spending time outside exercising, playing, sitting or resting. This can be in a public open space as often as you choose. You can do this alone, with other members of your household, or with one other person from outside your household. (You should keep 2 metres away from anyone from outside your household at all times). If you are [shielding](#) you should restrict any time outside to private outdoor space or garden.
- 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

Look at the advice and tips on these websites for young people if you feel like social distancing is affecting your mental health negatively.

- [Rise Above](#)
- [Young Minds](#)
- [Shout](#)
- [Childline](#)

## If you have divorced or separated parents

If you live across 2 families, because, for example, your parents live in different homes, you can move between both if you are under 18.

You are not allowed to move between houses for any other reason, such as moving between home and any second homes or student accommodation (unless you are a student making a permanent move). When moving between households, it is very important to follow the guidelines on handwashing and personal hygiene set out above in this document.

## 2. 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, roller blades, 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.

If you are travelling longer distances, you should do this by private vehicle if you can.

Consider all other forms of transport before using public transport, including buses, trains, trams and the underground. If you **have to** use public transport because there is no other option, you should use a face covering to cover your nose and mouth, as described in the above guidance, and should stay 2 metres away from other people where possible.

## 3. VISITING PUBLIC PLACES

You can exercise or play outside as often as you like. You can also sit and rest outside. Exercise or play can be alone, with members of your household, or with one other person from outside your household. You should keep 2 metres apart from any other person from outside your household at all times.

You can travel in a car to exercise in an open space. You should still avoid places that are likely to be busy, or where you might have to touch surfaces.

**This guidance is only applicable in England. In [Wales](#), [Scotland](#) or [Northern Ireland](#):**

- You can go outside for exercise, as often as you like, for example a run, walk or cycle alone or with members of your household. You should stay 2 metres away from other people at all times while exercising outside.
- You must not go outside for other activities such as sitting, sunbathing, or activities like football.
- In Wales, you must exercise locally

## 4. BUSINESSES AND VENUES

At the moment, many businesses are required by law to stay closed to the public. These include most public places like youth centres; community centres; gyms and leisure centres; places of worship; libraries; cinemas; hairdressers; and restaurants (except for takeaways).

Places that may be open include: shops and markets that sell food; hardware and DIY stores; garden centres.

Outdoor sports facilities may also be open. These include tennis and basketball courts, golf courses and bowling greens. You should only use these alone, with members of your household, or with one other person from outside your household (from whom you are advised to remain two metres apart at all times). If you are sharing a ball or other equipment with someone else, wash your hands before and after use.

## 5. GOING TO OTHER PEOPLE'S HOUSES

You cannot visit another person's house for any reasons other than:

- Going to the house of another parent or guardian if you normally move between separate houses and if you are under 18
- Going to child care if your parent or guardian(s) is a critical worker
- If you are a carer for a vulnerable person
- If you are a paid nanny or cleaner or providing another trades service such as urgent repairs. There is specific [guidance about working in people's homes](#).
- If you are looking to move there.

If you are taking food or other help to another person, you should not generally enter their house, and should keep 2 metres away from that other person at all times.

Though it may be difficult, you should not meet up with a romantic or sexual partner (boyfriend or girlfriend) during this time, unless you do so in a public open space and maintain a distance of 2 metres.

## 6. MEETING IN GROUPS

It is against the law to meet with more than one person at a time in a public place if they do not live in your household apart from limited circumstances as set out in the

law. However, you can go out with one or more persons who live with you or with one person outside your household for exercise or for open-air recreation. You should still try and stay 2 metres away (3 steps) from other people wherever possible.

It is really important that you continue to limit the number of people you see, even though this may feel difficult. The more people you see, the greater chances there are of more people catching the disease.

## **7. GOING TO WORK, EDUCATION, OR CHILDCARE**

- If you work you should be working from home, unless you can only work in your workplace
- If you volunteer, you can continue to volunteer but you should keep to social distancing rules.
- If you are a student you should be studying at home. There may be specific exceptions given by your university, if you think this might apply to you, contact your university.
- You are allowed to go to school or to childcare if your parents or guardians are critical workers, or if you have a social worker or an education health care (EHC) plan (a list of [critical workers is available](#))
- Whatever your family circumstances, you are allowed to go to school if the government has said that your class can return.

Some workplaces have now reopened, you can see the list of these [here](#). 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 work or school 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). You can read the full guidance on [self-isolation](#) here.

There are some situations in which someone else may come into your house to work, such as to clean, provide childcare, or to repair or maintain the house. Where possible, you should still stay 2m apart from anyone coming into your house.

## **8. 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](#)
- [The NHS](#)

## 9. 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, been delayed, or been cancelled. 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 themselves, 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 are 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.

## **10. ENFORCING THE LAW**

The law sets out clearly what you must and must not do – every person in the country must follow this law. Authorities, including the police, have been given the powers to enforce the law – including through fines (having to pay money). The police can also stop groups of people from gathering in a public place and may ask you to return to your house. The police also have the authority to arrest you.

## **11. 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.